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# Messages from the Old Testament

# THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW

THE WARBURTONIAN LECTURES  
FOR 1903—1907

BY THE  
RIGHT REV. EDGAR C. S. GIBSON, D.D.  
BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER

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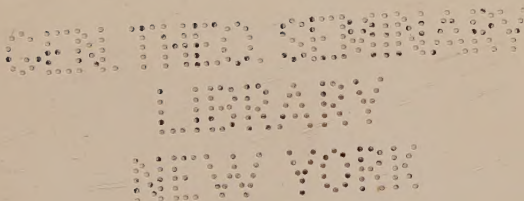
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# Messages from the Old Testament

By the  
Right Rev. Edgar C. S. Gibson, D.D.  
Bishop of Gloucester



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## Preface

THE following sermons and papers represent an attempt to give some help towards a right understanding and an intelligent use of the Old Testament. Many persons have felt that the recent 'critical' movement, of which they read much in popular literature, has made it impossible for them to read the Jewish Scriptures in exactly the same way as their fathers did; and I have been anxious to show that this fact need not in the very least impair their sense of the religious value of what must ever be to the Christian Church an integral part of the Holy Bible, or diminish their reverence for it as containing Divine messages for the twentieth century after CHRIST, as it did for the centuries before the Incarnation.

The sermons are printed exactly as they were delivered—the majority of them in the Parish Church of Leeds—and it has not been thought necessary to remove some repetitions, which under the circumstances were almost inevitable. As the sermons are largely expository, I am naturally indebted to many of our best writers on the Old Testament for the thoughts and interpretations of Scripture which I have adopted, and I have tried as far as

possible to give references and quote my authorities. But owing to the fact that many of them were written some years ago, and without any idea of publication, I have, in a few instances, been unable to trace the citations, and possibly in some cases I may be indebted to previous writers where no reference is given. If so, I trust that any writers who may recognise their own thoughts or words in any of these discourses will accept this as my apology. If Arthur Pendennis, as he turned over his old articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* a few months after they were written, when he had forgotten the books he had been reading, could not help wondering where he got his erudition from, the preacher may perhaps be excused if, as he looks over sermons preached some years ago, he fails in every case to recall the names of the authors whose works he had been reading, and whose thoughts and words he may, perhaps, unconsciously have borrowed.

E. C. S. G.

THE VICARAGE,  
LEEDS.

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# I

## Creation

GEN. i. 1 : 'In the beginning GOD created the heaven and the earth.'

PERHAPS no part of the Old Testament has caused more difficulty to thoughtful minds in the present day than the first chapter of Genesis. In former days it was accepted without more question than other parts of Genesis, nor did it seem to be involved in any special difficulty. In the present day its statements are widely called in question, and Churchmen are freely told that they must be prepared to give it up altogether, as men cannot be expected to believe it any longer. This is owing to two chief causes : (1) The discoveries of science. These have revolutionised our ideas about the beginning of things and the position of this earth in the universe. Foremost in time came the discoveries of astronomy ; then those of geology, when the rocks were made to give up their secret and to disclose the story of the long ages during which the present order of things was slowly coming into being. Then palæontology took up

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the tale, and taught us about primitive man and his ways, while the theory of development threw a flood of light on the origin of species in the world.

But it was not only the discoveries and theories of men of science that were deemed fatal to the account in Genesis. On the top of these there came (2) the announcement of the startling discoveries made by explorers such as the late George Smith in the mounds of Babylonia and Assyria, where long-buried clay tablets and cylinders of immense antiquity, covered with strange characters, were dug up; and when, by the patient labours of Assyriologists, they were deciphered it was found that they contained accounts of Creation older than that in Genesis, but so similar in character to it that it was almost impossible to resist the conclusion that the one had been borrowed from the other. And so we were told that the claim of Genesis to anything like Divine inspiration had been once for all disproved, and that it had better be quietly put on one side, and ignored by rational Christians.

What are we to say of these difficulties—difficulties which, I venture to think, are so widely felt that no apology is needed for discussing them in the pulpit? Well, let us consider first the second of the difficulties, that which is raised by the Babylonian and Assyrian discoveries, for I believe that we shall find that not only need it be no real stumbling-block to the faith of any thoughtful person, but that it may actually be made of very

real service towards the solution of the problems raised in connection with the relation of Genesis to scientific truth.

Now, it is impossible to deny that a real connection of some kind exists between the Biblical account of Creation and that preserved in the clay tablets and cylinders of Babylonia. The similarities and points of contact between the two are so striking that if the narratives are placed side by side it will appear at once that they are either derived from a common source, or that one is to some extent copied from the other. The immense antiquity of the Babylonian traditions seems to be firmly established. They cannot have been borrowed from Genesis. Indeed, one of our leading authorities on the subject says that it is far from impossible that the Hebrews acquired a knowledge of them as far back as the time of their earlier settlement in Babylonia, and that they carried these stories with them from Ur of the Chaldees.\* But granting this, what follows? Simply this: the old, somewhat artificial view (for which there is no Scriptural authority) that the early history of the world was specially revealed to Moses is certainly destroyed. The notion that the account of Creation was originally communicated to him in a series of visions must be altogether discarded. But the question of the inspiration of the Biblical account is still untouched, and ample room is still left for an element of direct revelation as well. These two things, inspiration and revelation, it must

\* Sayce. Cf. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 31.

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ever be remembered, are really distinct, though they are often confused, and the words are loosely used as if they meant the same thing. Inspiration may be defined as the actuating energy of the HOLY GHOST, under the influence of which men wrote down the record of GOD's dealings with the world. Revelation is the communication from GOD of truth not known previously to the person receiving the revelation, and in some cases impossible to be known without it. The Evangelist St. Luke was certainly inspired for his task, but we never hear that he was the recipient of a revelation. The Patriarchs received revelations from GOD, but we are nowhere told that they were inspired to record them.\* Thus the one may exist without the other. And, further, we learn quite conclusively from the preface to St. Luke's Gospel that inspiration does not supersede the labour of the careful historian, collecting his material from the best sources at his command, and tracing out all things accurately from the very first.

So in regard to these early chapters of Genesis, what if the same holds good there?

Instead of the old crude view of the composition of the book, a truer one seems to emerge. The Biblical historian derived his material from the best human sources available; the function of inspiration was to guide in the disposal and arrangement of the materials, and in the use to which they were applied. We can see, then, what

\* Cf. Archdeacon Lee on *The Inspiration of Holy Scripture*, p. 50.



Dr. Liddon so happily termed 'the inspiration of selection' at work throughout. And not merely did the sacred writer select from the material that lay ready to hand, but he so purified and transformed the narrative that the old story or tradition (call it what you will) became the medium of conveying Divine truths, and in those Divine truths we can often see a real revelation.

Does this seem to you a small thing? You have only to compare the Babylonian with the Scriptural account, and I am quite certain that you will be no less struck by the points of difference than by the points of likeness. Why is it that, while in the other accounts the crudest physical theories are combined with the materials, the grossest polytheism is apparent in every line, and the account of the creation of the world is preceded by a solemn account of the creation of the gods, in Genesis there is absolutely nothing of all this? There all that is absurd and grotesque is eliminated, no trace of polytheism is left, and the narrative opens with the majestic utterance, to which no parallel has been produced from any other account whatever: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' Why is this? we ask, and no explanation is forthcoming except that which sees a Divine guidance, and the action of the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, controlling, directing, and leading into truth.

Now let us turn back to the first difficulty and the question between Genesis and science, and see whether it is not the case that the Babylonian discoveries just alluded to may help us in adjusting

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the relations between the two. So long as it was thought that the whole account in Genesis was the result of a direct communication from God to Moses, I can imagine that perplexity might have been felt at the apparent discrepancies between it and the record of the rocks. But once grasp the fact that some human tradition has been used by the writer, and adopted as the basis of his narrative, and the right position for the consideration of the whole subject at once becomes clear. The object of Genesis is to teach religious truth. But a human tradition has been taken up and made the vehicle of this, and we are surely not called upon to think that the use made of it necessarily guarantees its literal and exact accord with facts. Matters which are discoverable by human reason, and the means of investigation which God has put within reach of man's faculties, are not the proper subjects of Divine revelation, and matters which do not concern morals or bear on man's spiritual relations towards God are not the province of revealed religion. Hear the words of a thoughtful writer on the subject, which we should do well to consider: 'If anyone is in search of accurate information regarding the age of this earth, or its relation to the sun, moon, and stars, or regarding the order in which plants and animals have appeared upon it, he is referred to recent text-books in astronomy, geology, and palæontology. No one for a moment dreams of referring a serious student of these subjects to the Bible as a source of information. It is not the object of the writers of Scripture to impart

physical instruction or to enlarge the bounds of scientific knowledge. But if anyone wishes to know what connection the world has with God, if he seeks to trace back all that now is to the very fountain-head of life, if he desires to discover some unifying principle, some illuminating purpose in the history of this earth, then we confidently refer him to this and subsequent chapters of Scripture as his safest—and, indeed, his only—guide to the information he seeks. Every writing must be judged by the object the writer has in view. If the object of the writer of Genesis was to convey physical information, then certainly it is imperfectly fulfilled. But if his object was to give an intelligible account of God's relation to the world and to man, then it must be owned that he has been successful in the highest degree.\*

Here, then, we seem to gain a thought that may help us. We need not be careful to consider whether in every case the narrative is in exact accord with what modern research may show, nor strain the words of Genesis in order to fit them in with the dominant theory of an ever advancing science. It would not be true to say that Genesis anticipates the results of science. It is true to say that it is independent of them, for the great religious truths which the Biblical record of Creation is intended to teach us stand untouched by the discoveries and investigations which have thrown such a flood of light on the early history

\* *Genesis*, by Marcus Dods (in *The Expositor's Bible*), p. 1.

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of the world. Those religious truths may be summed up in a few words as the following :

1. First, the fact of creation by GOD. Everything as we see it was made by GOD. Things have not just grown of themselves, but have been called into being by a presiding Intelligence and an originating Will.

Against materialism and pantheism it shows that the world was not self-originated, that 'it was called into existence and brought gradually into its present state at the will of a Spiritual Being, prior to it, independent of it, and deliberately planning every stage of its progress. It is this feature which distinguishes it fundamentally from the Babylonian cosmogony, to which it bears an external resemblance. The Babylonian scheme is essentially polytheistic. Chaos is anterior to Deity. The gods are made or produced : we know not whence or how. In Genesis the supremacy of the Creator is absolute.'\*

2. Secondly, we learn the fact that every stage is no product of chance or of mere mechanical force, but is an act of the Divine will, realises the Divine purpose, and receives the seal of Divine approval. The universe has no being of itself, but exists at GOD's will, and everything in it is in its essence good, as the product of the good GOD. Again and again is the Divine thought or purpose marked by the recurrent

\* See Dr. Driver's article on the cosmogony of Genesis, *Expositor*, 3rd series, vol. iii., p. 42. Reference should also be made to the same writer's new work, *The Book of Genesis*, in the *Westminster Commentaries*.

formula, 'And GOD said, Let there be . . . and it was so.' Secondary causes are nowhere mentioned, but they are not therefore denied, and room is left for any scientific theories with regard to the development of their action. Again and again, also, we have the Divine note of approval : 'and GOD saw that it was good.' 'And GOD saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.'

3. Thirdly, we notice the pre-eminence of man as the crown of creation, and his special relation to GOD as made in His image, after His likeness, to be His vicegerent, and to have dominion over the lower creation. 'So GOD created man in His own image, in the image of GOD created He him ; male and female created He them.'

I might mention other matters, but it is perhaps chiefly in these three points that we find the *revelation* of the first chapter of Genesis. The *inspiration* is seen throughout in the spirit that runs through it all, and the way in which the old tradition is made the medium of Divine truth, and purified and ennobled in the process. So interpreted and understood, we find no discord between what are really different sides of GOD's truth ; rather, we find that the old narrative is instinct with new meaning, and that GOD's method in revelation is brought into harmony with His method in nature. Our hold becomes deeper on the one increasing purpose which runs through the ages ; and if at first it requires some effort on the part of devout souls who love their Bible to readjust their ideas and modify conceptions which

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were formed in childhood and have grown with their growth, yet remember that it is true in every department of life that there is no advance without sacrifice, and the more we think of it, the more certain does it appear that, so read, the Bible has profounder truth to break forth out of it than the world has ever yet grasped; and so a day will surely come when these truths have been assimilated by the Christian consciousness, and then even those who love it most shall 'count new things as dear as old.'\*

\* Cf. Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, xxxix.



## II

# The Creation of Man

Ps. viii. 4: 'What is man?'

YEAR after year Septuagesima Sunday recalls to our minds those wonderful records of the past in which are enshrined, in inspired narratives, the answers which the wisdom of the ancients gave to this question. And in spite of all the advance that there has been in our knowledge, and all the progress that has been made by patient investigators in the different branches of science, with accurate observation of facts, and solid inferences, and brilliant guesses founded upon them, it is wonderful how little has really been added to the answers to the Psalmist's question which the Hebrew historian was inspired to give many centuries before the full revelation of God's truth through the Incarnation. Let us consider those answers to-day. They will be found in the first lessons for the morning and evening on Septuagesima Sunday.

The morning lesson is the first chapter of Genesis, with the opening verses of chapter ii., which clearly belong to it, giving the comple-

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tion of the week of creation, and the summary at its close. That for the evening consists of the remainder of chapter ii., which contains a quite distinct account of the Creation, differing in several important particulars from that which precedes it. No thoughtful reader can pass from one account to the other without being struck by the differences; and the relation of the two accounts to each other has been a standing puzzle to Biblical critics. Recent researches have, however, made it clear, beyond reasonable doubt, that they are distinct in origin, two ancient documents that have been placed side by side by a later editor, who has incorporated them in a larger work. The proof of this is found partly in the marked difference of style, for the second account is much freer and more varied than the first.

The narrative in chapter i. is 'unornate, measured, and precise,' and marked by the recurrence of certain phrases which fall on the ear with the regularity of the strokes of a clock that mark the hours. In that of chapter ii. the recurring phrases, though not entirely wanting, are less marked.\* The name used for the Divine Creator is different. Instead of the general word for GOD, *Elohim*, which alone we meet with in chapter i., we have the most sacred name of all, what we may without irreverence call the proper name of GOD, by which He revealed Himself to Moses at the bush—*Jehovah*, used throughout chapter ii. and iii., and very rarely elsewhere,

\* Cf. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 8.

in combination with the other word for God, *Jehovah Elohim*, very inadequately represented in the English versions by the LORD GOD. Further, the actions of GOD are described with some fullness and picturesqueness of detail. Instead of simply 'speaking,' 'making,' or 'creating,' as in chapter i., He is said to 'fashion,' to 'breathe into man's nostrils the breath of life,' to 'plant' a garden, to 'place,' to 'take,' to 'set,' to 'bring,' to 'close up,' to 'build,' to 'water' the garden.\* But beyond these divergencies of style, there are differences of representation, which show that the two accounts are not written from the same point of view.

The first account, brief as it is, aims at giving a complete picture of the creation of the world: The heavens and the earth, the light and the darkness, the dry land and sea, the heavenly bodies, and the inhabitants of the sea, the air, and the land, leading up to the creation of man, who stands as the crown and completion of it all. The second account is written from a different standpoint, with a more limited aim. The writer's interest is practically confined to man, the creation of other things being only mentioned in so far as they stand in special relation to man. Consequently, man is introduced as the first of creatures, apparently not only in respect of worth, but also in respect of time. The animals appear as created originally for him, and even the plant world is represented as if it had not been there before him.

\* See Gen. ii. 6-8, 15, 19-22.

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Let us admit these divergencies without hesitation.\* They need not disturb our faith in the inspiration of Scripture, for surely we can see that they only concern subordinate matters which do not affect the faith. The ancient narratives and traditions which had come down from immemorial antiquity, and were common to Israel with other nations of the East, are taken by the inspired writer, placed side by side, and made to become the vehicles and channels of religious truth. For matters of scientific interest we go to treatises on science, and we trust our scientific teachers, who have devoted a lifetime to their study. In matters of religious import we go to the Holy Scripture, and we trust this still more implicitly ; and on these matters the two narratives of Creation are at one. The form of representation varies, but the result, as far as religious truth is concerned, is the same in both ; for, in regard to the main point, the nature of man and his relation both to the creatures and the world around him essential agreement is manifested.

‘What is man?’ That is the real question which concerns us, and the answer is given in no faltering tones. He is the head of GOD’s creation on earth. This is made perfectly clear in each account, and so long as it is clear it matters not to us whether the truth is brought out, as it is in the one account, by placing his creation *last*, as if all else led up to it, and adding the Divine word which gives him ‘dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the

\* Cf. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 35.

cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth,' or whether it be represented, as in the other account, by placing man's creation *first*, and introducing afterwards the creation of plants and beasts to minister to him and supply his wants. The essential point—I repeat it—is that he is the head of GOD's creation on earth. But this is not all. 'What is man?' we ask. Is he only this, and nothing more? Nay, he has a unique relation to his Creator; and though on the one side he is akin to the beasts that perish, yet you have not exhausted all that is to be said of him when you have described his origin from the lower creatures and traced his descent from an anthropoid ape. And here, again, both our accounts are at one in claiming for him something higher and nobler. On the one hand, they not indistinctly imply that man on his physical side is related to the animal world, of which he forms a part. It is surely significant that in the first chapter, where the separate acts of creation are given to different days, the creation of man is assigned to the same day as the creation of the beasts of the earth, as if he were very closely related to them, and in the second account, while it is out of the ground that the LORD GOD formed every beast of the field and made every tree to grow, it is still out of the dust of the same ground that He is said to have formed man. What plainer terms could be used if the writer designed to indicate the kinship of man with the brutes, and his common origin with them? And if this were all, we might well

accept Darwin's account as not merely true so far as it goes and in its own proper sphere (which we need not hesitate in doing if scientific men tell us it is established), but as containing a *complete* account of man's origin and nature, and giving us the last word that is to be said on the subject. But, once again, this is not all, for the two accounts in Genesis are at one in declaring that man has a higher nature also, unshared by others, in which he is *akin to his Creator*. In chapter i., while assigning man's creation to the same day as that of the beasts of the earth, the writer places in the mouth of the Creator the majestic utterance, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness'; and in language which swells out into the stately rhythm of Hebrew poetry closes the account by stating that 'So GOD created man in His own image, in the image of GOD created He him; male and female created He them.' And in turning to chapter ii., we cannot fail to be arrested by the remarkable expression in verse 7, where, after telling us that the LORD GOD formed man of the dust of the ground, the writer proceeds at once to add the statement that 'the LORD GOD breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.' Surely here are indications, writ large, so that he who runs may read, which show us that man has a specific pre-eminence over the animals in the possession of a spiritual nature, which enables him to hold with his Creator such communion as it is given to none other to hold. And we are thus brought face to



face with a matter which is proper to revelation alone, and which is altogether outside the range of scientific treatises. As Professor Ray Lankester truly says in his work on Degeneration, 'Such an assumption as this does not in any way traverse the inferences from facts to which Darwinism leads us.'\* In all that science takes cognisance of man's ancestry may be determined, and he may be only an improved ape. But no physiological reason can touch the question whether GOD has not breathed into him a living soul, a spirit which goeth upward when bodily life ceases. It is this which, after all, gives these early chapters of Genesis their unique importance. They contain a revelation which can only come from above, and assure us that

'Trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From GOD who is our home,'†

a revelation which brings new hopes and aspirations into life, as it manifests our kinship with the Divine, and makes us exclaim with the Psalmist :

'O LORD our Governor, how excellent is Thy name in all the world !

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him ? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him ?

Thou madest him lower than the angels, to crown him with glory and worship.

O LORD our Governor, how excellent is Thy name in all the world !'

\* *Degeneration*, p. 66.

† Wordsworth, *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, etc.

### III

## The Fall

GEN. ii. 17 : ' In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'

THE narrative of the Fall, like the narrative of Creation which precedes it in Genesis, has given rise to endless discussions in recent years. In old days these narratives were accepted without question as containing all that could possibly be known of the beginnings of the present order of things, and devout souls were undisturbed by any doubts or difficulties connected with them. But during the last century all this was changed. The progress of knowledge of the history of the earth and the advance made in the physical sciences has shown us that GOD has left us other records of His creative work and of man's early history besides those enshrined in the Book of Genesis; and the difficulty of reconciling the record so patiently deciphered by the geologist and the palæontologist with the Hebrew traditions which we have all known and loved from our childhood has cast a dark shadow of doubt over the faith of many, and has bewildered not a few

of those who, feeling that they owe all that is best in them to their Christian faith, yet sorrowfully say that they scarcely see how they can hold it any longer. The same kind of thing has happened with the narrative of the Fall. There are difficulties which force themselves upon us to-day in the way of the literal acceptance of it, which were not, and from the nature of things could not be, present to our fathers. Two in particular may be mentioned—not as the only ones, but as the most important of those which are popularly urged against the teaching of the Church. The former of these has to do with the introduction of death into the world. The Book of Genesis, we are told, makes it very definitely the consequence of man's sin. 'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' St. Paul's commentary upon this in the New Testament is even more emphatic. Death 'came into the world by sin.'\* But how, we are asked, can we possibly accept such a representation as this with our present ascertained and certain knowledge of the world's history? We know that for long periods of time before ever man appeared upon earth death reigned supreme over the animal world. The beasts preyed upon each other then as they do now. The laws of Nature were the same then, and at work, as they are now, and death was certainly a present fact for centuries before the Fall. Nor can we imagine that man, who—at least, on the physical side—is closely connected with the brutes could ever have been

\* Rom. v. 12.

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exempt from it. The connection between death and sin, then, proclaimed by the Bible is, we are confidently told, one of the things that modern science has rudely shaken, so that it is no longer possible to maintain it. That is one difficulty which presses upon thoughtful minds; but it is not the only one. How, again we are asked, can you reconcile the teaching of Genesis with the teaching of science in regard to the history of man since his first appearance upon the earth? The Book of Genesis presents us with a picture—lovely, indeed, and most attractive—of man as originally in a state of primitive innocence and perfection, walking with God in the garden, and with all his wants satisfied without effort on his part by the beneficent provision made for him by his Creator; and then suddenly by the dark tragedy of the Fall all this is changed. Man is fallen from his high estate, and his progress is downward, along the path of deterioration. This first act of disobedience is presently followed by murder, and before long we read of the whole earth as corrupt. As Keble puts it in *The Christian Year* :

‘’Twas but one little drop of sin  
We saw this morning enter in ;  
And lo ! at eventide the world is drowned.’\*

How different is this from what science teaches us of primitive man—scarcely distinguishable from the ape, ‘unable to forecast to-morrow or to

\* *The Christian Year* : Hymn for Sexagesima Sunday.

comprehend yesterday, living from hand to mouth on the wild products of Nature, clothed in skin or bark, or daubed with clay, and finding shelter in trees and caves; ignorant of the simplest arts, save to chip a stone missile, and perhaps to produce fire; and then gradually rising from this state of primitive savagery, as he leaves behind first the old and then the new Stone Age, and passes gradually through the various ages of Metal—Copper, Bronze, and Iron. Thus, while Scripture, to put it briefly, teaches a fall and a deterioration, science loudly proclaims a rise and a development.

My brethren, I have stated these difficulties quite frankly, and with no effort to minimise them, with no desire to disturb the faith of any, or wrongly to suggest doubts to those who are free from them; but I have felt it right to bring the subject forward, because I know that the difficulties are already present to the minds of many, and if there should be the slightest suspicion that the clergy shirk them, or are afraid of them, it will be disastrous to the interests of religion, and will go hard with our teaching in other matters also. But having said this, let me say further that I do not think that the existence of these difficulties need for one moment shake our belief in the Divine authority of the Old Testament when rightly understood; still less need it give rise to any haunting fear lest Christianity itself should fail us. It has stood the test of difficulties even greater than these before now. But, at the same time, I cannot but look on the

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existence of these difficulties as involving us in a serious responsibility, and as a summons to us from GOD Himself, bidding us look again at our interpretation of Scripture, and urging us to make quite sure that there has not grown up over the text of it a crust of interpretation, which, however venerable, is no part of the sacred deposit. I am sure that many persons have been accustomed to read into Holy Scripture a great deal that is not really there, and have substituted their own ideas of what it should mean for the actual statements for which it is really responsible. Let us, then, take the statements of Scripture and see what they actually say, and remember that not Scripture, but Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is responsible for a great deal of the popular theology of the day. Dismiss this famous poem (noble as it is), with all its associations and suggestions, from your mind, and think only of what Scripture itself says, and then you will perhaps see that, when fairly interpreted and freed from the glosses with which it has been encumbered, there is nothing in regard to either of the points indicated which need shake our belief in its Divine authority within its proper sphere.

Take first its teaching about death and its commencement. Everything here depends upon what you mean by death. If 'death' is simply physical demise, the shuffling off this mortal coil, then not only is Scripture in direct opposition to the record of the rocks, but the Divine proclamation to Adam, 'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,' was proved by the issue to



be completely false. He did not die. But the proclamation was profoundly true if by 'death' you mean the penal consequences of sin, alienation from GOD, unrest, predisposition to wrong, and all the manifold phases of that awful history which culminates in what theology calls 'the bitter pains of death,' the grave, and all that it introduces to.\* And that 'death' in Scripture frequently means something very different from mere physical demise is clear to every reader. 'If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death.'† 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.' 'He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.‡ And once more we are expressly told that CHRIST hath 'abolished death.'§ What do you understand by that? We know that He has not abolished the physical transition. We see this every day of our lives. The saintliest of men has to pass through it equally with the worst of sinners. But for him it ceases to be what it was before. It has become 'the gate of life immortal,' and it is surely fair to say that 'sin only introduced death in the sense in which CHRIST abolished it.'|| If this is so, the difficulty disappears altogether. We are not concerned to dispute the facts to which science so triumphantly points. We admit its teaching in its own sphere without hesitation. We are prepared to admit that had man not sinned there might indeed have been a passage

\* See Cave, *Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p. 312, etc.

† John viii. 51.

‡ 1 John iii. 14.

§ 2 Tim. i. 10.

|| Bishop Gore in *Lux Mundi*, p. 536.

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from one state to another, a physical dissolution, but it would not have been what the Scriptures term death. And lest you should think that such teaching as this is only a sort of afterthought on the part of theologians just to escape a difficulty, I would remind you that this interpretation existed among trained divines long centuries before scientific investigations had suggested the contradiction, and before ever the difficulty was felt at all.

Two of the greatest theologians of the early Church, alike in East and West, Athanasius and Augustine, 'emphasise the truth that death, as we call it, is the law of our physical life, and that when Adam died he was only undergoing what belonged to his animal nature. In being left to death he was only left to the law of his physical being.'\*

Enough has, perhaps, now been said on this point. I pass on to the second. Christianity represents a fall, science a gradual rise. So the objection is stated. But here, again, it is possible that we have read into the narrative of Genesis a good deal that is not really contained in it or reasonably to be inferred from it. Divines have indeed been found to maintain that 'an Aristotle is but the rubbish of an Adam, and Athens but the rudiments of Paradise,'† but not such is the teaching of Scripture. There is no doubt that as regards sin and the moral order of things a fall

\* Aug., *De gen. ad litt.*, vi. 36 ; Ath., *De Incarn.*, 4, quoted in *Lux Mundi*, *loc. cit.*

† South, Sermon on Gen. i. 27.

is distinctly taught, and we boldly claim that in the teaching of Scripture on this point is to be found the only key to the riddle of human nature. What explanation can be found of the marvellous contradictions of humanity—man's greatness when looked at from one side, his littleness when viewed from another? Why is life 'such a comedy to those who think, such a tragedy to those who feel'? You look out on humanity at large, and you see a world out of joint, presenting the most contradictory appearances, distracted by the most opposite tendencies, with no remedy for its disorders, no key to its riddles. 'Read man in one way,' says the late Dean Church, 'and he seems made for GOD and truth. Read him in another, and nothing can express the interval which separates him from all that is holy, perfect, eternal, his blind stumbling through an existence which has come from chance, the unmeaningness, the vanity of his life. How is it that he knows so much, and can think so powerfully, and yet, after all, knows so little, and so imperfectly? Why should his knowledge, just where it is most important, find an impassable barrier, and truth elude and betray him just where he most wants it? To look at his great endowments, his wonderful achievements, his never-ending progress, he seems indeed the crown and glory and perfection of GOD's creation. But look at him again, in comparison with what his very powers enable him to see, the immensity, the inscrutability of the universe, and he sinks into an insignificance which he has not the imagination to measure or the

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words to express. . . . There he is, this marvelously compounded creature, so ingenious, yet so stupid; so wise, and yet so incredibly foolish; able to do so right, yet constantly doing so wrong; balancing between good and evil, sin and repentance, till the wavering is cut short by death. And that, multiplied by the numbers of mankind, is the broad aspect of human life.'\*

What is the explanation of these extraordinary anomalies of man's condition, and of the contradictions in which he is involved? There is only one account of it that can be given which will ever satisfy the plain common-sense of mankind, and it is the account given us in the early chapters of the first book of Holy Scripture. Man's greatness is fallen greatness. It is indeed royal greatness, but it is the greatness of a king dethroned, dispossessed, disinherited, banished. To this we hold fast, and we point to the evidence of facts and to the testimony of poets and philosophers of the world as supporting us in maintaining that 'our life is a false nature—'tis not in the harmony of things,' and that, as Shelley says,

'The universe  
In Nature's silent eloquence declares  
That all fulfil the works of love and joy,  
All but the outcast man.'†

'*The outcast man.*' It is too true, and that *in the moral and spiritual sphere* the Fall is a terrible

\* *Pascal and other Sermons*, pp. 7-10.

† See Mozley's *Lectures and other Theological Papers*, Lecture X.

reality our hearts bear witness. But in all else the record contained in the Bible itself points quite clearly to an advance and progress. It has been truly called 'the book of development,'\* and if you only read it carefully, and without bringing preconceived notions to its study, you cannot fail to see that it represents the fabric of civilisation and the arts as being gradually built up by slow degrees and little by little. There is nothing to make us think that primitive man was in possession of the arts, or that his condition was one of developed civilisation. 'All that we are led to believe,' says one of the greatest of living theologians, 'is that the historical development of man has not been the development simply as God meant it. It has been tainted through its whole fabric by an element of moral disorder, of human wilfulness. . . . It has been a development with God only too often left out, the development under conditions of merely physical laws of a being meant to be spiritual.'†

The difficulties, then, which are so often raised about these early chapters of Genesis need not greatly concern us. In its own proper sphere, and as regards its teaching concerning man's moral and spiritual nature, Holy Scripture remains as authoritative as ever. We can read it with our eyes open to all the wonderful truths that modern discoveries in the region of the physical sciences can teach us, but with hearts as quick as ever to respond to the yet more wonderful truths which

\* Bishop Gore in *Lux Mundi*, p. 534.

† *Ibid.*, p. 535.

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GOD Himself has here revealed to us. There stand out from the narrative of the Fall in the third chapter of Genesis these two great lessons, which are as fresh to-day as they were on the day on which they were first written : (1) That sin, and all that sin brings with it of misery and death, came not of man's nature, but of his disobedience to GOD, and rejection of the limitations under which He placed him, under the stress of external temptation ; and (2) that, in spite of all that sin has brought about, GOD has not left man to himself, but that through it all there shines a star of hope and a sure promise of future victory. The serpent may indeed 'bruise the heel' of the seed of the woman, but in the end the woman's seed shall 'bruise the serpent's head.'



## IV

# The Lesson of Massah and Meribah

EXOD. xvii. 7. 'He called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the striving of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?'

FEW incidents during the wanderings in the wilderness made a deeper impression upon the Jews than the striking of the rock by Moses, and the supply of water from it which followed, if, at least, we may judge from the number of references to it in their national literature. It was a signal manifestation of GOD's power, and of that love which was able and willing to supply all their needs, and as such it is alluded to again and again in the Psalms. The Psalmist delights to describe how GOD 'clave the hard rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink thereof, as it had been out of the great depth. He brought waters out of the stony rock, so that it gushed out like the rivers.'\* He sings how He 'opened the rock of stone, and the waters flowed out, so that rivers ran in the dry places';† and he speaks with

\* Ps. lxxviii. 16, 17.

† *Ibid.*, cv. 40.

reverent awe of the God who 'turned the hard rock into a standing water, and the flint-stone into a springing well.'\* In later ages also the Jews were never tired of dwelling on the story, and a rich growth of legend and tradition (for which there is no foundation in the sacred narrative) sprang up and flourished about it. And as it was so signal an example of God's power to satisfy thirsty souls under most unpromising circumstances, it is no wonder that men have loved to dwell on it as a type of His willingness and power to satisfy the spiritual cravings of mankind with the water of life; just as St. Paul takes it in his Epistle, where he reminds the Corinthians that the Jews 'all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them: and that rock was CHRIST.'†

But if, on the one hand, the incident thus stood out brightly as a signal manifestation of God's power and love, there was a darker side to it as well, for, on the other hand, it was a no less striking and mournful example of the faithlessness and unbelief of God's people, and as such also it made a deep impression. So in that psalm which the Christian Church has taken for daily use in her morning service there is a reference which the English reader is apt to miss, for when in the *Venite* the appeal is made, 'To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts; as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works,'‡ there is in the original a

\* Ps. cxiv. 8.

† 1 Cor. x. 4.

‡ Ps. xcv. 8.

definite and clear allusion to that which happened 'at Meribah, in the day of Massah'; and these names, which were given to the spot in commemoration of the incident, stood forth to all time as a memorial of Israel's ingratitude, for Meribah means strife and Massah temptation. 'He called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the striving of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?' It was indeed a tempting of God. After so many manifestations of His power and goodness towards them they were still unable to trust Him for an instant. Think of all that had happened during the last few months, and of all the manifold proofs they had received that He was among them. The signs wrought in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan; the passage of the Red Sea, and the destruction of their foes; the guidance vouchsafed to them through the overshadowing cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; the sweetening of the bitter waters of Marah, and the gracious supply of their wants when He 'commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven'; when He 'rained down manna also upon them for to eat, and gave them food from heaven.'\* And yet in spite of all this at the first difficulty, when they had pitched in Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink, they rounded on their leader, and were ready to stone him, complaining that he had brought them up out of Egypt to kill them. It was, as Moses himself said, a rejection,

\* Ps. lxxviii. 24, 25.

not of him, but of **GOD**, whose minister he was, a 'tempting **GOD**,' to use the expressive phrase of Scripture — a phrase, however, which perhaps needs a word of explanation, since it has shifted its meaning. In modern parlance to 'tempt' is commonly used in the sense of enticing a person in order that he may act in a particular way, whereas the Scriptural idea of 'tempting' is frequently somewhat different from this, as when it is said that '**GOD** did tempt Abraham,'\* or, here, that the people 'tempted **GOD**.'

In such passages the word means to prove a person, whether he will act in a certain way, or whether the character which he bears is well established. So when it is said that **GOD** did 'tempt Abraham,' it means that **GOD** put him to the test to prove if his fidelity and affection were sincere; and when Israel is said to have 'tempted Jehovah,' it means that they acted as if doubting whether His promise was true, or whether He was really faithful to the character in which He had so often revealed Himself as a present **GOD**, able and ready to supply their every need. 'They tempted the **LORD**, saying, Is the **LORD** among us, or not?' It indicated on their part a temper of distrust, a readiness to fall into a panic, to doubt **GOD**, and so to forsake Him at the first difficulty; and for this it is that it is so often alluded to in the subsequent history as a warning and example to all time. It marked the temper which looks for **GOD** in the fire, the storm, and the earthquake, but which cannot recognise Him in the still small

\* Gen. xxii. 1.

voice; the temper which cannot be content without striking and exceptional manifestations of His Presence; the temper which our LORD met with the rebuke, 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe';\* a temper which is always ready to doubt and disbelieve unless GOD is disclosing Himself in a startling way, in something that is, as we say, out of the common. 'They tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?'

Can we say that we of to-day have no need to lay to heart the warning which is writ so large on the face of the story, and that the temper which I have just described as shown by Israel has no counterpart among us now? The doubt which Israel felt of GOD's power and presence, because of an unexpected difficulty and a new problem, seems to me typical of that timid, faithless attitude which comes over so many when the advance of knowledge and discovery raises some difficulty with regard to the Christian faith. Take, for instance, the attitude which many persons adopted when, more than forty years ago, the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* revolutionised the thoughts of scientific men. The dread and horror with which many persons regarded the theory of evolution and development there advocated, based though it was on most patient investigations, and a marvellous collection of minute and significant facts, disclosed just this temper of mind. Men were afraid that the acknowledgment of Darwin's conclusion would eliminate GOD from His creation. They fancied

\* John iv. 48.

that unless what is called special creation was maintained belief in GOD Himself must be shaken; and they assailed the author of the work in question as if he must be an atheist, in spite of that fine paragraph at the end of the volume—a passage which the writer never altered—which distinctly recognised a Creator as having, on Darwin's view, breathed life originally into one or a few forms at first.\*

'Is the LORD among us, or not?' men asked, as if His presence depended on His having manifested Himself in one particular way. The attitude of panic has passed away now with regard to this particular controversy, and men can face Darwin's conclusions without the slightest fear that the Christian faith will be shaken by their acceptance. But in a more recent controversy as to the composition, authorship, and meaning of the Old Testament, exactly the same timid and faithless attitude has been manifested, as if the Christian faith was bound up with a particular interpretation of the Old Testament, and must go by the board if conclusions adverse to that interpretation, however overwhelming the evidence for them, be accepted. God in this latter day is speaking through historical criticism to those who have ears

\* 'There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms, most beautiful and most wonderful, have been and are being evolved' (*The Origin of Species*, concluding paragraph).



to hear in tones as distinct as ever He spoke to Israel of old; but men will not recognise His voice, because He tells them that He has not always manifested Himself in ways which they imagine, in the fire or the earthquake, the signs and wonders for which they have been accustomed to look. 'Is the LORD among us, or not?' they are asking to-day, as Israel asked of old, and so the Psalmist's warning appeal rings in our ears with an ever new and deeper meaning. 'To-day, O that ye would hear His voice! Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah, in the day of Massah.' Let Israel's faithlessness and incapacity to trust Him be a warning to us of these later generations. Let us be true to all the truth which God may show us, however hard it may be at first to harmonise it with our previous conceptions. God cannot contradict Himself. In the end the new will be found to be in accord with the old, and the noble words with which our greatest Christian hymn of praise closes will once more justify themselves, as they have so often done already in the history of the Church. 'In Thee, O LORD, have I trusted: I shall not be confounded eternally.'

## V

### Our LORD as the Prophet

DEUT. xviii. 15 : 'The LORD thy GOD will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me ; unto Him ye shall hearken.'

THERE is no doubt that these words, which have come down to us as one of the last utterances of Moses, did more than almost any others to create and keep alive that expectation of some great prophet to come, sometimes identified with Messiah, sometimes distinguished from Him, which we discover to have existed among the Jews generally at the time of our LORD'S earthly ministry. The words were familiar to every Jew from his childhood, and through all the changes and vicissitudes of his national history, through those long years, when vision and prophecy alike had ceased, there they stood as the great promise of GOD, of the ultimate fulfilment of which no Jew who believed in the faithfulness of his GOD could have a shadow of doubt. And thus when a new teacher arose the question was at once asked, with anxious interest, Could this be the prophet whose coming Moses had announced,

and whom the devout-minded among the people, those who, like Simeon and Hannah, were waiting for the consolation of Israel, were eagerly expecting? So we read when the nation was stirred to its depths by the preaching of John the Baptist the Jews sent priests and Levites to John, and they asked him, 'Who art thou? And he confessed and denied not; but confessed, I am not the CHRIST. And they asked him, What, then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou the prophet? And he answered, No. . . . And they asked him and said, Why baptizest thou then if thou be not the CHRIST, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?'

\* So also during our LORD'S earthly ministry careful reading of the New Testament in the more accurate Revised Version makes it clear that from time to time He was recognised as 'the Prophet'; not merely as *a* prophet, as if He had been one of many, or simply one of the old prophets risen again, but more precisely as 'the Prophet'—the Prophet, that is, like unto Moses, of whom it had been promised long centuries before that the LORD GOD would raise Him up. Thus, after the feeding of the five thousand in the wilderness, a miracle which naturally recalled to the minds of the people the way in which Moses had, by the grace of GOD, been enabled to feed still greater multitudes in the desert of Sinai with bread from heaven, we read, 'When therefore the people saw the miracle which He did, they said, This is of a truth the Prophet that cometh into the world.'

† Again, some months later there was

\* John i. 19-25.

† *Ibid.*, vi. 14.

a similar incident. At the Feast of Tabernacles, which commemorated the sojourning of the children of Israel in tents in the wilderness, 'on the last day of the feast, JESUS stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'

The minds of the bystanders were full of the associations and scenes of the forty years' wandering in the desert, and their thoughts would naturally travel back to that other great miracle of Moses, when at his bidding rivers of water flowed from the stony rock, and the thirsting multitudes drank of it. So at once we find that some of the multitudes, when they heard these words, said: 'This is of a truth the Prophet.'\* And yet, once more, when on the occasion of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem all the city was stirred, and the air rang with the glad shouts of 'Hosanna!' the question passed from mouth to mouth, 'Who is this?' and the answer returned by the enthusiasm of the multitude was: 'This is the Prophet, JESUS, from Nazareth of Galilee.'†

It will be seen, then, that the passage taken as the text is really the primary one for fixing our conception of the office of CHRIST as our Prophet. We are to think of Him as a prophet like unto Moses; and this is, I think, suggestive, and may throw some light on the nature of CHRIST's prophetic office, and perhaps modify our conception of it. What, then, does the name of

\* John vii. 40.

† Matt. xxi. 10, 11.

prophet suggest to you, and what is your idea of a prophet?

To most persons the name suggests the thought of prediction—of speaking before, of foretelling the future. The gift of prophecy is widely imagined to be a power of foreseeing in detail the course of coming events, which enables men to write down the history of them before it has come to pass. This, however, is a comparatively modern conception, and is not the main thought which Holy Scripture puts before us in regard to the prophets of the Old Testament or our Blessed LORD Himself as pre-eminently the Prophet. ‘A Prophet shall the LORD your GOD raise up unto you like unto me.’ The words imply that the speaker, who (it must always be remembered) is represented to be Moses, was himself a prophet, as the one to come was to be like him. But we can all see that prediction occupies but a very small place in the life of Moses. True, it is not entirely absent, but it is not the dominant feature. He was a prophet, not as a *foreteller*, but as a *forth* teller, and a speaker *for* GOD. We instinctively think of him as the giver of the law, the revealer of GOD Himself, rather than as the man who announced beforehand the course of history. Incidentally, indeed, there are in his utterances announcements of the future; but how do they come in? Not so much because he had *foresight* of the incidents and details which were afterwards to be written down in the pages of history, but rather because he had such clear and swift *insight* into the mind of GOD, and could, therefore, unveil

the working of the eternal laws of God's dealing with men, and through this insight could anticipate with unerring certainty that, given certain conditions on the part of man, certain results were sure to follow. He could thus warn and threaten on the one hand, and on the other could announce mercy as well as judgment. He had insight into the mind of God. Had he not gone up into the Mount of Sinai, among the lightnings and thunders and voices, when, 'Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire'?\* He had heard the voice of the Almighty, and knew the terrors of His judgment. Yes; but had there not also been granted to him that other vision of God, when, as he cowered in the cleft of the rock, a voice came from the glory that passed by, and proclaimed: 'The LORD, the LORD, a GOD full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.'† And so, because he had thus been admitted to know the very mind of God, His infinite compassion, as well as His wrath against sin, he was able, at the close of his sternest warnings of future judgment, to add those words of exquisite tenderness, which have rung in the ears of God's scattered people from that day to this: 'Yet for all that I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them altogether, and to break My covenant with them, for I am the LORD their GOD,‡ a passage which shines with the glory of the rainbow of mercy

\* Exod. xix. 18.

† *Ibid.*, xxxiv. 6.

‡ Lev. xxvi. 44.



after the storm of judgment, and which, for its gracious tenderness, the Jews have for centuries loved to call 'the section of the golden yet.' 'Yet for all that.' Yes; it was because of this insight into the Divine counsels that Moses was a prophet of the LORD GOD. He could speak for Him, because He knew His mind, had been admitted to closest intercourse with Him, 'face to face as a man speaketh with his friend,'\* and had seen His glory.

And the Prophet whom the LORD raised up centuries afterwards from among His people, like unto Moses, does not the same hold good of Him, only in a far higher way? It is as the revealer of the will and law of GOD that JESUS CHRIST is our Prophet. The utterances of His which, in the strict sense of the words, predict the future are limited in number; but those in which He shows us the mind of God are past counting. Here, again, it is *insight* rather than *foresight* that marks Him out as Prophet. And if we can say of Moses that he was admitted to communion with GOD, and saw His glory, and that, therefore, he could proclaim His will, what can we say of the only-begotten SON, who has existed from all eternity in the bosom of the FATHER, who so shared His throne that He could speak of 'the glory which I had with Thee before the world was,'† and who Himself has told us that 'no man knoweth the SON but the FATHER, neither knoweth any man the FATHER save the SON, and he to whom the SON will reveal Him'?‡ It is this

\* Exod. xxxiii. 11.

† John xvii. 5.

‡ Matt. xi. 27.

which gives to the teaching of CHRIST its supreme place in the heart of Christendom, which makes us bow to His words as the ultimate authority behind which we can never get. He spoke what He knew, and testified what He had seen. His are the words of one whose communion with His heavenly FATHER all through His earthly ministry was so close and unbroken that as we listen to them we feel sometimes, if we may reverently say so, that He spoke almost as if He forgot that He was on earth, so filled was He with the sense of communion with His FATHER. 'No man hath ascended up into heaven save He that came down from heaven, even the SON of man, which is in heaven.'\* On all that concerns His Divine mission and work His human soul was so flooded with a fulness of Divine knowledge that He spoke with an authority which comes from the union of two natures in a single personality, and that personality Divine. Thus we feel that His teaching for us is final. He is our Master, and to His words we yield unquestioning assent. They are true to the end of time; and the only questions we can raise with regard to them concern their meaning and what He intended to teach us. It is perfectly true that we recognise that in His infinite love for us and His desire to be in all things made like unto His brethren, sin only except, He voluntarily submitted to limitations of knowledge, and in ordinary matters, outside the sphere of the special work which He came to do, willed to be dependent on ordinary sources of

\* John iii. 13.

information. But the recognition of this in no way prejudices our sense of His unquestioned authority on all matters which did concern His work and His mission. He 'condescended not to know' in things which concerned them not ; but on those matters which He came to reveal He spoke what He knew and testified what He had seen, and therefore claimed by His own inherent right the submission of the conscience and will and intellect of men.

Let us illustrate this from a subject which is much in our thoughts to-day—the subject of prayer. We are met together at the bidding of authority for special supplications for God's blessing on our forces now unhappily engaged in war.\* It is true that to-day thanksgiving is mingled with prayer. Our hearts are full of gratitude for deliverance, for victories, for dauntless courage and endeavours, but still the dominant thought is prayer and intercession. And many persons are asking the question whether prayer is really of any avail, and can do us any good. So men are asking to-day, as they have asked in the past, and probably will go on asking till the end of time. But for those who take CHRIST as their Prophet and Master, who believe that He reveals the mind of the FATHER, and can see things of the unseen world, there is only room for one answer. Prayer *is* a power in the world. I can no more doubt this than I can doubt the fact

\* The sermon was preached on the day of intercession on behalf of His Majesty's naval and military forces in South Africa during the Boer War in 1900.

of my own existence. My Master has pledged Himself to it, and I believe His word. There may be difficulties and perplexities, puzzling problems which we cannot solve, and fools may ask questions which wise men cannot answer, but if the authority of CHRIST's word is to have weight, of the fact itself there can be no doubt. 'Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'\* 'All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them.† 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly FATHER give the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask Him.‡ Such passages are decisive for His disciples ; only, while He teaches us thus plainly that GOD does hear prayer, let us never forget how much of His teaching is concerned with enforcing the much-needed lesson of what prayer really is. Men doubt as to the efficacy of prayer, because they imagine it to be a mere form or charm. Our LORD teaches us that it is real hard work. It is not the thoughtless utterance of a formula, or the hasty repetition of a *Pater Noster*. It is not a mere traditional habit in which the mind 'dreams its way through a dialect of dead words, and floats on the current of a stereotyped phraseology.' Nay, it is the urgent entreaty of the soul that will not be denied. It is like the ceaseless cry of the importunate widow, or the persistent knocking of the man

\* Matt. vii. 7.

† Mark xi. 24.

‡ Luke xi. 13.

who stands outside the door in the cold and rain at midnight, determined to get what he wants from those within ; and before you dare question the efficacy of prayer, or set it down as useless, it would be well if you were to ask yourself *whether you have ever prayed at all*. And so with this day of intercession of ours, that is now drawing to a close, let us, ere it passes, gather up into one the desires and petitions which we have been offering up, and with all the energy of an intense faith, and pleading CHRIST'S promises as living realities, say with the patriarch of old, 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.'\* So shall this day prove fruitful of blessing to all those—the living, the dying, and the departed—whom we commend into the hands of our God, as our Creator and most merciful Saviour.

\* Gen. xxxii. 26.

## VI

# The Miracles of the Old Testament

Ps. xliv. 3, 4: 'They gat not the land in possession through their own sword: neither was it their own arm that helped them. But Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them.'

THE book which bears the name of Joshua stands first among what we call the historical books of the Old Testament, and taking up the thread of history where it is dropped in the Pentateuch at the death of Moses, describes the conquest of the land of promise, and its partition among the twelve tribes. Across the whole book there seems to be written this great lesson: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.' 'They gat not the land in possession through their own sword: neither was it their own arm that helped them. But Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them.' Nowhere else do we see with greater clearness man's absolute dependence upon Divine assistance, and the way in which by Divine grace the weak are made strong.



Jordan is dried up before the armies of Israel. The walls of Jericho fall before them, and the city is taken without a blow. The sin of Achan leads to defeat and disaster, and must be atoned for before the tide of conquest can again set in. But once more God fights for His people; by His power their foes are discomfited in two pitched battles, and Israel is firmly planted in the land of promise. We can all see the great lesson written clearly upon the face of the book, and nowhere else is it more impressively stated. But there is one thing which certainly puzzles and staggers some persons when they read it. It is the wealth of miracle which is related, not here only, but in other parts of the Old Testament also. There are many who find it hard to accept the accounts given of God's miraculous interposition for His people at the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan, and on other occasions. Did these things really happen? they ask. Did God in very truth thus manifest Himself on earth? Now, the question is one which ought to be fairly faced, and which it is not wise to shirk. In the course of a single sermon I cannot do much with it. But there are some considerations, which I should like to put before you, which personally I have found to be helpful, and which possibly may throw fresh light on the matter for some. In considering what I am about to say, however, I would ask you to leave out of your thoughts the narrative of the tenth chapter, with Joshua's command to the sun to stand still on Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. That narrative seems to me to require

separate treatment, and must be made the subject of a separate discourse. Broadly, then, it ought to be granted by all that to one who believes in a personal God miracles are *possible*. So much is shown with great clearness, among others, by John Stuart Mill.\* Whether they are *probable* is another matter. But at least those who believe in a personal God (and unless a man believes in one it is of no use arguing about miracles with him) have no right to dismiss them as intrinsically incredible, and so manifestly false as to discredit the narrative in which they occur. Nor are we justified in cavilling at any supposed interference with, or infraction of, natural laws. There is not necessarily any more 'interference' than there is in those numerous cases in everyday life in which the action of a higher law comes in and modifies the result of the lower. When you hurl a stone into space or rig up a force-pump, the laws of Nature are not suspended or interfered with; but a new force is introduced, and the results of the natural laws are controlled. These laws still act and produce their full effects, but a new power has supervened, and the final result represents the combined effect of the two forces. So it is with miracles. But having said this in order to remove objections that may arise, let us remember also that, so far as we can trace God's dealings with men, He never compels belief. Having created man free, God always respects the freedom wherewith He has endowed him. He does not coerce him

\* *Three Essays on Religion : Theism.*

into acceptance of the truth. As a matter of fact, the miracles of which we read in the Old Testament did not compel the surrounding nations to accept Israel's GOD, by whom they were wrought. Men were somehow able to shut their eyes to the evidence of a present GOD, guiding and controlling the affairs of men; in Scriptural phrase, they 'hardened their hearts.' This is, it seems to me, a very material consideration for us. It suggests that there must be something wrong in the crude way in which we sometimes represent the scene to ourselves. We are apt, in picturing the Biblical scenes to our minds, to forget altogether the true character of the Biblical history. Not only do we lose sight of the profound conviction which the Jew felt in the reality of GOD's presence in the world, and his intense realisation that everything natural was His work, so that, leaving out all mention of secondary causes, he could attribute it all to GOD, but we also ignore the way in which the Hebrews thought in figurative and symbolic language, their graphic and pictorial way of describing things, such as you find among untutored races in the present day. We fail to make allowance for the Oriental breadth of style and conception which leads to statements which, though perfectly well understood by an Eastern, yet if found in a Western writer, accustomed to precision and mathematical exactness could only be termed the grossest exaggeration. And so failing, we take the narrative in the baldest and most literal fashion, and represent the scene to ourselves as something so startling,

so impressive, so contrary to Nature, that it seems as if it must perforce have convinced, even against his will, anyone who witnessed it of God's personal intervention on behalf of His people.

Now, here, it seems to me, we are quite wrong. In every case there must have been some way out of it for those who did not wish to believe. They must have been able to represent the matter to themselves either as accident, or as—I say not the result of some natural law, for there was little conception of natural laws in those early days—but a familiar process. In the case of many of the Old Testament miracles modern research enables us to understand better than our fathers could how this may have been. Take the ten plagues of Egypt as an example. We are told on good authority that each of these inflictions has a demonstrable connection with Egyptian customs and phenomena, and that they were all marvellous, not as reversing, but as developing, forces inherent in Nature, and directing them to a special end. The first of them, for instance—the Nile being turned into blood. It is well known that before the annual rise of the river its water is green and unfit to drink; but towards the end of June it becomes clear, and then yellow and reddish, the depth of the colour varying in different years, and this being due to natural causes; and when the colour is very deep the water has an offensive smell, and travellers say that the broad turbid tide has a striking resemblance

to a river of blood.\* Thus it seems probable that the miracle was really an intensification of a natural phenomenon; and that while, following as it did upon the word of Moses, the occurrence might well strike Pharaoh with amazement and dismay, and appear as the direct act of God, yet it would not compel belief or work complete conviction. On second thoughts Pharaoh might easily harden his heart, and persuade himself that, after all, it was but an accident. So we might go through the rest of the plagues, and we should find that something of the same kind holds good in each case.

Or, take the passage of the Red Sea. Those who are responsible for the representations of the scene in Bible picture-books have sometimes taken literally the picturesque phrase of the narrator that 'the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left,'† and have painted the billows as piled up on either hand like a literal wall built by the hand of masons, in such a way that—had such really been the case—it is impossible to imagine that the Egyptians could have failed to see the direct action of Almighty God Himself; and surely in this case they would never have ventured to pursue after Israel any further. Rather, they would have argued that if their God can do this for them it is idle to endeavour to stop them. Such a manifest interference on behalf of Israel would have compelled a sullen acceptance of the

\* See the *Speaker's Commentary* on Exod. vii. 17.

† Exod. xiv. 22.

power of Jehovah, and a belief in the hopelessness of contending against Him. But read the narrative carefully and you will see that, though the deliverance is rightly attributed absolutely to the intervention of God Himself, the agency of secondary and natural causes is distinctly stated. The Lord 'caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.'\* Travellers and archæologists who have made a special study of the locality and conditions are unanimous in telling how this could actually have happened where the passage of the Red Sea is supposed to have taken place, and they tell us also that a sudden cessation of the wind at sunrise, coinciding with a spring tide (and remember it was full moon), would immediately convert the low, flat sand-banks, first into a quicksand and then into a mass of waters, in a time far less than would suffice for the escape of a single chariot or horseman. Yes; and is not this exactly what we read: 'And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.'† I might add other illustrations also, but these are perhaps sufficient.

\* Exod. xiv. 21.

† *Ibid.*, 27, 28.



But now, what is the outcome of all this? Is it to deny miracle? Most certainly not. It is only to get rid of our old crude ideas about the scene and GOD's method of intervention, but not for one moment to deny the intervention of the personal GOD. It was 'the LORD's doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes.'\* But in this way we may perhaps remove the sense of unreality which sometimes haunts the reader of the Old Testament, for he learns to see that the miracle may lie, not in any capricious or arbitrary interference with the order of Nature, but often in the coincidence, divinely brought about, between the word of GOD, and facts in the natural world, and GOD's own law; so that the natural is, as it were, lifted up into the domain of the miraculous by the manner in which it is timed and the ends it is made to serve.† Those who have eyes to see can see clearly enough the hand of GOD; but if a man will not see, GOD will not force him to. There is always the 'natural' solution in which he may take refuge, beyond which he may refuse, and beyond which it may be impossible to compel him, to proceed. But for us, who believe in a personal GOD, and who know and are sure that this GOD has spoken and revealed Himself to us in His SON, these things are sure tokens and clear manifestations of His Presence and Power; and if, in this way, we learn to read these records of ancient days with a greater sense of the reality of the events, we should learn also to read them with

\* Ps. cxviii. 23.

† Cf. Trench, *On Miracles*, chap. ii.

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a firmer grasp and a truer belief in the controlling power of the GOD whom we adore. 'So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: doubtless *there is a GOD that judgeth the earth.*'

## VII

### The Battle of Beth-horon

JOSH. x. 12, 13: 'Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and He said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies.'

THERE are few passages in the Old Testament which have caused more perplexity than this. In considering the Old Testament miracles in general, it was said that in all probability they appeared in a very different character to those who actually beheld them from that with which they are invested by popular imagination. We saw that the miracle lay not in any capricious or arbitrary interference with the order of Nature, and that in many cases it consisted not in the reversal but in the development of forces inherent in Nature, or in the coincidence, divinely brought about, between the word of God, on the one hand, and facts in the natural world, and God's own law, on the other, so that the natural was, as it were, lifted up into the domain of the miraculous by the manner in which it

was timed and the ends it was made to serve. We saw also that if God does not *coerce* men into belief there must have been some way of representing the miracles as natural or accidental, in which the unbeliever could take refuge, and thus escape from the acknowledgment of the direct interference of an Almighty God on behalf of His people.

But it may be fairly asked, How can the line of reasoning thus adopted be made to apply to the incident recorded in Joshua x. ? There, surely, the miracle was of such a character that if it was really the case, as the Jews in later days certainly imagined, that 'the sun went back, and one day became as two,'\* it is hard to see how there could have been any possibility of evading the inference that the Creator and Governor of the universe had Himself directly intervened and controlled the action of His own laws imposed upon the universe, and modified the results of those general laws which govern the course of Nature, in order that the victory of Israel on this occasion might be rendered complete. It was for this reason that I asked you, in considering miracles generally, to dismiss this particular incident from your minds, for I do not honestly think that the line of reasoning then adopted can fairly be made to apply to it. It requires special consideration by itself, and this must be given to it now. Let me say at the outset that I think that much of the criticism which the narrative has met with is altogether beside the mark. We need not

\* Eccclus. xlvi. 4.

trouble ourselves much about the objection that since the sun does not move it was a manifest absurdity to command it to stand still, or with the criticism that the sudden stoppage of the revolution of the earth upon its axis would have dashed to pieces all the works of human hands that were to be found upon its surface, and hurled the earth itself, with its satellite the moon, out of their orbit. The former of these objections assumes that we are tied to a bald literalism in the interpretation of Scripture, which no sensible person is concerned to maintain, for, as Kepler himself long ago pointed out, all that Joshua can be supposed to have prayed for was that the mountains might not intercept the sun from him. Joshua's knowledge of the system of the universe was certainly no better than that generally possessed at that time, but even had it been, had he been a very Newton, he would have expressed himself exactly as he did, and made use of popular language, as we all do to-day when we speak of the sun rising or setting.

Again, the second objection leaves out of sight the fact that the omnipotent hand of GOD, which not only created the stars, but gave them their power to revolve with such regularity in their orbits as long as this universe endures, and which upholds and governs all things in heaven and on earth, is not too short to guard against any such disastrous consequences as those imagined. These are the shallow objections which did duty some years ago, but the difficulties which beset thoughtful and reverent minds to-day are of a wholly

different order from these. We have learnt that our GOD is a GOD of law and order, and there are those who find it hard to think that such an interposition on His part is consistent with the character in which He has revealed Himself to us. It was an old heathen rule of the drama that the intervention of a god was not to be invoked unless the occasion was worthy of it; and there are thoughtful minds which, while fully admitting the possibility of such a miracle, yet feel a difficulty in understanding that the occasion was one which really demanded it. It is not that they question GOD's *power*, but rather that they are unable to reconcile such action on His part as they think is here described with the conception of Him which they have learnt from the New Testament and from the study of Nature to form. That is the real difficulty, and, as I have put it, you will, I think, see that it is a *moral* one rather than one which is concerned with physical possibilities and impossibilities.

And now, how are we to deal with it? Well, let us make quite sure that our interpretation of the narrative is the right one, and that we are not reading into it a great deal that is not really there. If you look carefully at the chapter, you will see that, while it is clearly stated all through that the Lord was on the side of Israel, and the hail-storm which so signally discomfited the Amorites is traced, and rightly traced, to His action, yet all reference to the particular miracle of prolonging the day is confined to exactly three verses (12, 13, 14), and that in the sequel, after the account of the



flight and pursuit and capture of the five kings, the going down of the sun at the close of that memorable day is alluded to as naturally and simply as possible, and not as if there was anything extraordinary or exceptional about it. 'And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun that Joshua commanded, and they took down the bodies of the kings off the trees, and cast them into the cave where they had hidden themselves.'

Further, you will notice that in verse 13 the author of the Book of Joshua gives us his authority for the statement he has made about the sun standing still, and actually tells us the name of the document from which he is quoting. 'Is it not written in the Book of Jasher?' This same Book of Jasher is referred to again in 2 Sam. i. as the source from which the writer of the Book of Samuel extracted David's lament over Saul and Jonathan; and though the book itself is no longer forthcoming, it seems almost certain that it must have been an early collection of national songs, containing poems in praise of heroic deeds, the name, 'the Book of Jasher,' perhaps signifying the book of the heroes. At any rate, there is no question whatever that the passage before us, like the elegy on Saul and Jonathan, is an extract, not from a prose narrative or history, but from a poem. It is marked by the use of exceptional and poetical words, as well as by the 'parallelism of members'—that is, the balance of words and thought rhythm—which constitutes the dominant and essential feature of Hebrew poetry.

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All this has been lost sight of by most readers of the Bible. But when once it is grasped very important consequences follow as to the manner in which the words are to be understood. The poetry of the Bible, like all other poetry, must be interpreted as poetry, and not as exact and literal description. In other cases we are quite ready to read poetry as poetry, and not to impute to it the exactness and precision of scientific prose. Look at the song of Deborah in Judges v., for instance: 'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.' Nobody dreams of interpreting this literally, or of imagining an astronomical miracle there. We can all see that what is meant is (as we ourselves might well phrase it) that the very elements themselves seemed to be ranged on the side of Israel. Or when David says in the eighteenth Psalm, 'He bowed the heavens also and came down. . . . He sent from on high, and took me; He drew me out of many waters,' we do not even pause to ask in what sense we are to understand his words. We instinctively remember that we are reading a psalm, and make the requisite allowance for the imaginative and impassioned tone of his language. We do not for an instant suppose that GOD stretched a physical arm through a physical heaven, and plucked David out of a boiling flood, in which he was in imminent danger of being drowned. Nor do we for an instant deny either that David prayed to GOD from the depth of some great trouble, or that he received, and knew that he received, an answer to his prayer. We at once understand that in answer

to his cry for help GOD delivered His servant from a peril as dreadful and overwhelming as a flood, by an act of grace as marvellous as though He had stretched down a hand out of heaven.\* And similarly with the passage before us. Only realise that it is an extract from an ancient poetical account of the battle, and you will no longer be troubled with the idea that its words are to be taken *au pied de la lettre*. Read the whole account, the prose setting as well as the poetical extract, and you will see that, though the victory rested with Israel, there was a moment when it seemed as if the fruits of victory might be snatched from them by the flight of the foe. This would surely happen if, under cover of the approach of night, the fugitives should be suffered to escape. What Joshua, then, earnestly desired was that the victory might be rendered complete ere night fell. And cannot we understand that, just as when an Apostle charges us, 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,'† he is not contemplating any miraculous extension of the day, but only pleading for a speedy cessation of human passion through the work of grace in the heart, so if Joshua prayed that the sun might not go down upon an incomplete victory, his prayer would really mean nothing more than this, that GOD would so hasten His work and nerve the arm of Israel that the discomfiture of the foe might be made absolute, and

\* Cf. S. Cox in the *Expositor*, vol. i., 1st series, 'Joshua commanding the Sun and the Moon to stand still,' an article to which this sermon is greatly indebted.

† Eph. iv. 26.

the work of two days, as it were, crowded into one, and yet, in the highly figurative language of Eastern poetry, this might well be represented as it was in the Book of Jasher ?

‘Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon ;  
And thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon.’

And when the prayer was heard, and the work accomplished, it must have seemed indeed as if

‘The sun stood still, and the moon stayed,  
Until the nation had avenged themselves upon their enemies.’

Thus it appears to me that in these verses we are not intended to understand any special miracle beyond that which is involved in what we find all through the Book of Joshua—viz., that the LORD fought for Israel ; or, as the psalmist puts it, ‘They gat not the land in possession through their own sword, neither was it their own arm that helped them ; but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them.’ There is, then, nothing in this chapter that need cause any special perplexity, as if there was something inconsistent with the character of God. And is it not some confirmation of the interpretation I have advocated that nowhere else in the whole range of the canonical books of the Bible is there any allusion whatever to any miraculous prolongation of the day on this occasion ? There is such an allusion in the Apocrypha,\* which shows us that the Jews in later days regarded it as a miracle ; but though references to the wonders of the Exodus and the

\* Eccclus. xlvi. 4.

passage of the Red Sea and the Jordan are numerous, there is in the canonical books a significant silence with regard to this particular incident. Even where we might reasonably have looked for a reference to it we look in vain. On the ordinary interpretation, which regards it as a miraculous prolongation of the day at the prayer of Joshua, it was certainly one of the most stupendous triumphs of faith imaginable ; and yet, in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where the writer sums up the great deeds of the heroes of Hebrew history, and ascribes them all to faith, it is not this victory, but the capture of Jericho, that is selected as the special example of the power of faith in that generation, nor will you find a single reference to the narrative elsewhere.

And now to conclude. If you have followed me so far, does not the line of interpretation which I have endeavoured to set before you in these two discourses make the Old Testament history seem, not only more natural, but more real to you? We are no longer haunted by a sense of unreality, and the characters no longer appear as puppets pulled by strings, but as real living men and women. The gain in this way is immense. But do not let us stop here, or rest content with this thought alone, but follow it up by another, which concerns us yet more closely. This way of reading the Old Testament may and ought to suggest to us a way of reading the facts of present-day history also, which should greatly affect our lives, and bring God nearer to us than He has ever been before. The devout Israelite, outwardly (as

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we now know) so much like others, with the same sort of things happening to him as happened to them, sometimes victorious, sometimes unsuccessful, knew that he possessed the key to the meaning of things, which was not granted to others. He could see the hand of GOD everywhere, could believe that there was a personal will behind all phenomena, shaping, controlling, directing; and when he wrote down the account of his people's experiences, he boldly traced them all to the action of GOD Himself, and reckoned but little of the secondary causes through which He worked. The Christian, with the fuller light of the Gospel, is, alas! apt to imagine that, though formerly GOD manifested Himself in the world and wrought great wonders for His people, yet, since the Ascension and the days of the Apostles, He has left the world to get on as best it can by itself. It is this un-Christian view of history that the new reading of the Old Testament may help us to banish. See in all things, now as then, the hand of Him without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground. Consider Him, not as an absentee GOD, or sitting apart in a remote position of general superintendence, but as present with all that is, and holding sovereign sway over all things now as in the days when psalmist and prophet wrote. Learn to see Him everywhere, in history as well as Nature, and trace even the commonest and most ordinary events to His providence and governance, as Israel did, and then I do not think that the question of Old Testament miracles will disturb you much; and surely to those who believe



the promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway,'\* it ought not to be difficult to do this. Only let the Christian Church, the inheritor of the promises, learn boldly to take up the very same position to-day that Israel took of old, and the result will be a gain that will far more than counterbalance any loss that has come to us through the shock of reconstructing traditional ideas, for it will bring back God into the world, and bring Him closer than ever into our daily lives.

\* Matt. xxviii. 20.

## VIII

# The Book of Judges

JUDG. v. 24: 'Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.'

THE moral difficulties of the Book of Judges culminate in this verse out of the fifth chapter. Perplexing passages are not wanting elsewhere in the book. The treachery by which Ehud gains access to Eglon and slays him is a stumbling-block to some. Jephthah's fulfilment of his rash vow and sacrifice of his daughter, the low moral tone of Samson, and the way in which he fooled away God's great gift—all these seem hard to explain; but nowhere else is the difficulty so keenly felt as in the case of the murder of Sisera by Jael, and the commendation bestowed upon it by the prophetess Deborah. It is not merely that the act is related as a simple piece of history, as is many another murder in Holy Scripture, but it is that the author of the book appears to regard it as an heroic act, and that it is actually held up to admiration by a prophetess in that grand song of praise which Deborah and Barak sang to the

LORD in the day of Israel's triumph : 'Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent.' It is surely a miserable evasion to say that no commendation is here intended, but that Deborah simply stated as a fact that the wives of the nomad Arabs would undoubtedly regard Jael as a public benefactress, and praise her as a popular heroine. Such an explanation of Deborah's words has been attempted,\* but it is wholly inadequate. Common-sense revolts against it, for no one who reads her song without prejudice can doubt that Deborah herself regarded Jael as a heroine, and meant to invoke a benediction upon her for her deed.- What, then, are we to say of this? Does the commendation by the prophetess compel us to justify the act? and if not, can we continue to regard the book in which it is recorded as a Divine one? Questions such as these can hardly fail to arise in our minds, and perplex thoughtful persons as they hear this chapter read in the order of our service. And first, with regard to the act itself, let us try to avoid exaggeration on either side. Nothing is gained by using strong language about it, calling it dastardly treachery, and piling up words to express indignation at it; and, on the other hand, it seems to put a strain upon our moral sense if we attempt to defend it as an altogether praiseworthy act, due to an overpowering patriotic impulse which could override the ordinary instincts of humanity and hospitality.

\* See Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, art. 'Jael,' vol. i., part ii., p. 1505.

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There are ugly features in it which no overpowering impulse of patriotism can entirely excuse. But even admitting that neither the act itself nor Deborah's commendation of it can be really justified by us, I do not think that either need surprise us, or make us doubt the Divine character of the Old Testament as a portion of the revealed Word of God. Only realise the true position of the Old Testament, and very much of the difficulty felt—not only about this, but about other acts of the Judges also—will disappear from view.

How, then, are we to regard the Old Testament? Broadly speaking, there are three conceivable views that may be taken of it. It may be regarded (1) as contrary to the New; (2) as on a level with it; or (3) as preparatory, while yet inferior, to it. In the earliest days of the Church the first of these three positions was tolerably widely held. Many among the so-called Gnostic heretics took up a position of more or less decided hostility to the Old Testament. Some among them regarded the Creator of the world, the God of the Jews revealed in the Old Testament, as a subordinate being, from the defects of whose work CHRIST was sent by the supreme God to redeem mankind. Others went further, and not only maintained that Creation was the work of a being hostile to the true God, but actually glorified Cain, Esau, Korah, and others who are described in the Old Testament as disobedient to God. These men they regarded as their saints and heroes; and naturally they rejected the teaching of the Old

Testament altogether, and asserted that it was directly contrary to the New. For a Christian who accepts the New Testament such a position is wholly impossible. Our LORD's utterances with regard to the Old Testament show very plainly that He at least regarded it as a Divine book. To it He constantly makes His appeal. He came 'not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them.'\* 'The Scriptures' of the Old Testament, He tells us, 'cannot be broken.'† Moses and the prophets are His standard authorities, which testify of Him, whose Scriptures must be fulfilled. So in the Acts of the Apostles those who search the Scriptures are commended.‡ And St. Paul, writing before ever there was a collection of books of the New Testament, and so referring only to the Old, says directly that 'all Scripture, GOD-inspired as it is, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness';§ and thus no one who admits the authority of our LORD and His Apostles, or accepts the New Testament as a whole, can possibly feel any hesitation in regarding the Old Testament as an inspired work, an integral part of God's revelation of Himself to man.

So much for the first position: the Old Testament is not contrary to the New. That it is on a level with it has been the opinion maintained by many from the days of the Puritans of the sixteenth century onwards. So far were the Puritans from regarding it as in any way inferior to the New

\* Matt. v. 17.

† Acts xvii. 11.

‡ John x. 35.

§ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

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that they were for ever regulating their conduct by it. The actions of those who lived in the dim twilight of a preparatory dispensation were taken by them as models for those who enjoyed the light of the Gospel, and deeds such as those of Ehud and Jael were held to warrant the commission of similar deeds on the part of Christians. John Balfour of Burley could justify the assassination of Archbishop Sharp in cold blood by his appeals to the Book of Judges, and by the action of Samuel in hewing Agag in pieces. He and others like him regarded themselves as God's chosen people, and, branding all who did not see eye to eye with them in religious matters as idolaters who would bow down to the golden calf at Bethel, imagined that they themselves had received a Divine commission to extirpate such heathen, like the Jews of old, and that they were under a similar charge to show no quarter. Thus the historian of the insurrection of the Covenanters, which the genius of Scott has immortalized in *Old Mortality*, seriously tells us of the grief of one of their leaders when on one occasion some of his followers had let go five of their captives, 'after that the LORD had delivered them into their hands, that they might dash them against the stones'; and he adds that the said leader 'reckoned the sparing of these enemies, and letting them go, among their first steppings aside, for which he feared the LORD would not honour them or do much more for him.'\*

\* See the quotation from *A True and Impartial Account of the Persecuted Presbyterians, etc.*, in the notes to *Old Mortality*, chap. ix.



This view, however, equally with the former one, is opposed to the plain teaching of our LORD in the Gospel. There He distinctly draws a contrast between what was permitted or even enjoined under the old dispensation, and what is allowable now. He extends, or modifies, or repeals provisions of the law: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.'\* And when the Pharisees bring before Him the question of divorce, and remind Him that the law of Moses permitted a man to put away his wife, back came the answer at once, 'For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of the Creation, male and female made He them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.'† And when the sons of thunder appealed to the example of Elijah, and asked to be allowed to call down fire upon the inhospitable Samaritans, as also Elijah did, He turned at once and rebuked them. 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.'‡

Thus both these views—(1) that the Old Testament is contrary to the New, and (2) that it is to

\* Matt. v. 38, 39.

† Mark x. 5-9.

‡ Luke ix. 55, 56.

be placed on a level with it as in all points a guide for Christian conduct, are condemned by our LORD. If either of them be adopted we are landed in grave moral difficulties. Plainly, the truth lies somewhere between them; and if only men would learn to regard the Old Testament as our LORD Himself regarded it—viz., as preparatory, while inferior, to the New—they would soon find that their difficulties in connection with it would diminish, if not altogether disappear. The two classes of passages already quoted show distinctly that while our LORD regarded it as Divine, and as preparing for His mission and work, He yet held that the spirit for Christian men is not that of the Old Covenant. A higher revelation has taught us that things cannot now be defended which once, ‘for the hardness of men’s hearts,’ were permitted. We can surely understand how under a preparatory dispensation perfection could not be attained, and how much that we now see to have been culpable and faulty could be tolerated for the time if only there was a *forward movement* going on, and if men were gradually rising to a higher level. And it is just this *forward movement* which we can discern so clearly all through the Old Testament, and which justifies its claim to be regarded as an integral part of Holy Scripture; and the interest of the Book of Judges is that, in belonging as it does to a very early period, it takes us back to the beginning of the nation’s life, so that by its help we can trace its development from its earliest and rudest stages. On this point let me quote to you some words from a modern writer on the book,

which put the matter very clearly before us. 'It is a picture of a dark age, of the darkest age, probably, of Hebrew history. It brings before us in a series of sketches the conditions of life and thought in a time when the knowledge of God was dim and the ethical ideas of men were crude. The Hebrews are the people to whom in later ages the highest and purest conceptions of religion and righteousness were given; but these conceptions were the result of a long training and a severe discipline, and this Book of Judges shows us what the Hebrews were in the beginning, out of what kind of stuff the prophets and lawgivers and psalmists of Israel were developed. It is very instructive to observe such an evolution; . . . and these stories of the Judges are for this purpose of unspeakable value. The people of that rude time are permitted to bring before us in their own way their ideas about God and their conceptions of human conduct. Upon these pages, with the utmost simplicity and sincerity, they tell us their thoughts, they live out their life; we see them working, worshipping, scheming, fighting, journeying, sojourning—nothing is hidden from us. Their crudest ideas, their most heathenish beliefs, are laid bare to our view, and this not by someone who stands outside and moralises about it from a higher plane, but by themselves; for the stories, though brought together by a later compiler, are in substance clearly the handiwork of men who lived when such conceptions were current. Such, then, were the raw materials of humanity, out of which were to be constructed the sublimities and

glories of the Hebrew faith. Men like Gideon, and Othniel, and Barak, and Jephthah, and Samson, were to become under the education of the Spirit such chivalrous heroes as David, such noblemen as Hezekiah, such clear-sighted moralists as the authors of the Proverbs, such seers as Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hosea and Amos, such singers as those who wrote the Psalms, such spiritual philosophers as the author of the Book of Job. A most precious product of Divine inspiration is this spiritual faith of Israel; and here in the Judges we see the hole of the pit out of which it was digged.\*

Remembering this, we can, I think, understand both Jael's act and Deborah's praise of it. We are not called upon to justify either. But when we take into account the circumstances of the age and the very imperfect light granted to that generation we can understand them both. Judged by the standard of the Gospel they cannot but be condemned. But to apply to them this standard is to forget altogether the preparatory and disciplinary character of God's dealings with His people, and to ignore the teaching of our LORD with regard to the Old Testament. There *was* an element of goodness in Jael's act. Her motive was good, though our trained moral sense revolts against the method she adopted for ridding Israel of its most formidable foe. But if there was this element of goodness in it, why should we feel surprise if a prophetess—an inspired prophetess, if you will—in that wild age, with its crude notions

\* Washington Gladden, *Seven Puzzling Books*, p. 63.

of right and wrong, should seize upon it, and utter her benediction over the doer of the deed? It is a benediction which could only have been uttered in such an age, but just where it stands in the Bible it is perfectly natural. And, after all, say what you will about this and some other passages in the book, we may well thank God that it finds a place within the canon of Holy Scripture, for we can all find in it even now a stimulus for virtue. We may well be inspired and stimulated by the devotion of these heroes and heroines of Israel. 'We need not copy their barbarities. JESUS CHRIST has taught us to discriminate between the good and evil in their conduct, but we can never read this record without having our courage strengthened and our patriotism quickened. Gideon's dauntless deeds, Deborah's flaming speech, Samson's sublime self-sacrifice, the unhesitating self-abnegation of the daughter of Jephthah, all kindle in our hearts the fire of noble endeavour.'\*

And, lastly, remember that stamped upon the book as a whole there is one most important lesson, which is as needful to-day as ever it was. *Be true to your highest convictions.* This is the lesson which one after another of these narratives emphasises. Faithfulness to Jehovah brought welfare and prosperity and peace to Israel, disobedience to Him brought bondage and misery. So long as the Israelites were true to their convictions and followed the light which was granted to them, so long 'the land had rest.' It was when they 'forgot God their Saviour,' and 'did evil in

\* Washington Gladden, *Seven Puzzling Books*, p. 65.

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the sight of the LORD,' and went after Baal and Ashtoreth, that He 'sold them into the hands of their enemies.' And still the law holds good in regard to our eternal and spiritual welfare, that when men follow the highest they know it is well with them; and when they forsake the highest they know and go after other gods, it is ill with them. And are there none among us who are doing exactly as Israel did? Seeking gain, prizes, and pleasures that do not ennoble, but rather degrade us. These are the idols, the Baals and Ashtoreths of to-day, and, depend upon it, the teaching of this old-world book is not yet out of date. *Be true to your highest convictions.* Be faithful to the God who has revealed Himself to you, even more clearly than He revealed Himself to Israel, and it shall be well with you. Fidelity to the highest truth you know is the straight path to life. That is the lesson of the Book of Judges, and if we can only lay it to heart we shall not have studied the book in vain.



## IX

### Elisha's Gift.\*

2 KINGS ii. 9, 10: 'And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.'

LET me say a word at the outset to remove a possible misconception concerning the character of Elisha's request. It was not of so ambitious or extravagant a nature as might at first sight be supposed. The 'double portion' which he requested does not mean twice as much of the spirit as Elijah had possessed. It denotes something quite different from this, for we see from a passage in Deuteronomy,<sup>†</sup> to which the margin of the Revised Version refers us, that the phrase was a technical one for the share of a man's property which the Jewish law assigned to the eldest son. He was to receive a 'double portion'—*i.e.*, twice as much as any of the younger sons. And this is what Elisha asked for. His request was that he might be treated as Elijah's heir and

\* An ordination sermon.

† Deut. xxi. 17.

successor, and that twice as much of his master's spirit might be granted to *him* as to any others of the sons of the prophets, not twice as much of the spirit as Elijah himself possessed.

With this explanation of the request, let us turn to consider the nature of Elijah's reply, and the test or condition proposed in it.

'Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, this shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.'

Can we see any special significance in the condition thus offered? Or are we to regard it as something purely arbitrary? Does it offer any test of Elisha's power and character which stands in an intimate connection with the office and gift to which he aspires? Or is it something external and fanciful, dissociated altogether from the position and capacities of the man to whom it is to be applied? A little thought will show us that there is nothing whimsical or capricious about it, but that it stands in closest relation to the prophet's ministry. Elijah would by this sign indicate to his faithful follower that for the prophet's office something more is needed besides obedience, loyalty, and devotion. In these Elisha has been already tested. These qualities Elijah knows him to possess. But something more is required, and there may have lurked in the elder prophet's mind a doubt whether his follower was dowered with the one thing needful for the position to which he aspired.

The prophet's message has to do with the

things of the spiritual world, and if his ministry is to be fruitful he must have the gift of *insight*, eyes with the capacity to pierce the veil, and see clearly the things of that invisible sphere of which he speaks.

Where this power is wanting, where the man's vision reaches no further than that of ordinary men, then, though he may possess zeal, enthusiasm, earnestness, and devotion, yet he is lacking in the one gift which alone can qualify him for the task he seeks. He is not worthy to wear the prophet's mantle, and it is not for him to take up the task which drops from the hands of those who have gone before. Where, on the other hand, this power exists, there he can do all things : he can speak of the things of the spiritual life, not with the uneasy fear of detection which haunts the man who is talking of a subject that he has got up hastily at second hand, and has never thoroughly mastered, but with the glad confidence which has in it the ring of genuineness and the note of truth that are characteristic of one who speaks what he knows and testifies what he has seen ; and therefore it is that the test is offered to Elisha. 'Thou hast asked a hard thing : nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee ; but if not, it shall not be so.'

That was the condition ; and when the time came, and the elder prophet was swept away in the blaze of the fiery chariot, and carried up by a whirlwind into heaven, Elisha saw it. His eyes were strong enough to bear the sight. They

could see that which was hidden from others. They were powerful to penetrate the mysteries of that heavenly sphere which 'lies about us,' not only 'in our infancy,' but all the days of our pilgrimage—so very near, and yet to many so very far.

And when he returned to the sons of the prophets they recognised in him the worthy successor of their master who was taken away from them. They 'came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him, and they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha.'\*

The incident is not without its lessons for the Church to-day. And for Christian ministers above all it is full of instruction. You, my brothers in CHRIST JESUS, who are coming forward to-day—it is of no use to disguise the fact that it is a 'hard thing' for which you are asking. It is well that you should realise this now, that there may be no disappointment hereafter. The days are past when it was possible to regard the life of the parish priest as an easy one. It matters not whether your lot is to be cast in town or country; wherever it be, the claims made upon your time, your powers, your devotion, will become each year more exacting. Even the world expects much from us, and looks with contempt, which it does not care to conceal, upon a lazy, indolent, or careless priest. And as the demands made upon our energies become more exhausting, and the rush of practical work increases, so also the requirements of learning assume a more pressing

\* 2 Kings ii. 15.

character. New questions are constantly coming to the front, new problems arise demanding patient and thoughtful consideration at our hands. The newspapers, and magazines, and novels of the day have popularised religious questions, and familiarised the world at large with religious difficulties in a manner undreamed of fifty years ago. Difficulties and doubts are in the air. Our faith is perpetually being challenged and called upon to justify itself to perplexed or hostile inquirers. Each year it becomes more and more an absolute necessity for every Christian minister to be able, at any moment, to give a reason for the hope that is in him.

At such a time you come forward and ask to be treated as the heirs and successors of those who have gone before, to step into their places, and take up the task that drops from their worn-out hands. Verily it is a 'hard thing' for which you are asking. And yet God forbid that you should shrink from undertaking it, or that these, the last unauthoritative words which you will hear before receiving your commission, should sound to you discouraging. If the responsibilities are great, so also is the honour great. The cause is the noblest on earth, and one that is fitted to call forth the noblest enthusiasm. Only we ask you to realise in the presence of God to-day that there is one condition which must be fulfilled if your ministry is not to end in disaster and failure. The kingdom which you are to proclaim is not of this world. You will go in and out among your people, not simply as the kindly friend or the relieving

officer, still less as the undertaker responsible for their burial, but first and foremost to let God into the lives of men, to bring heaven down to earth, and, in the midst of a sense-bound, materialistic age, to bear your testimony to the reality and importance of the unseen and the invisible.

And for this is there not something more than good intentions, a kind heart, activity, and even earnestness needed? 'Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.' May we not say that there is a similar condition required in our case? It is the 'kingdom of heaven' which we are to proclaim, and though this is set up on earth in a visible form, yet, as it has to do with powers of another order, there must be the vision of the eternal indwelling Presence of Him, whose kingdom it is, to inspire us. If we are to speak of spiritual things, above all we must be spiritual men, able to speak from personal experience of the things of the spiritual world, as those who are living in it. And thus, if to us be granted the gift of insight, if our eyes are open to those eternal realities of that kingdom of heaven which, invisible to the eye of sense, lies all around us, then we can take up the work without fear or hesitation. But if not—if we know nothing by personal knowledge and personal insight of that spiritual world and spiritual life, the language of which will ever be on our lips; if our vision is bounded by the low level of the horizon of this world, and our thoughts centred on things earthly



and material, then 'it shall not be so'; and better by far were it to turn aside to the humblest of earthly callings than to place one's self voluntarily in the falsest of all false positions—that of the man who is set to speak of a subject of which he has never mastered the rudiments.

'If our eyes are open'—how shall I best make my meaning clear to you? Bear with me while I try to bring home to you how that heaven into which Elisha saw Elijah pass, and into which, when the great forty days were ended, the Apostles saw their Divine Master ascend, is no far-away region into which we have hopes of being admitted hereafter, but a realm which is very close to us already, and into which we may freely ascend and enter now—a world of which we *must* know something by personal experience if our ministry is to be anything more than a hollow sham. To understand this, let us start by considering the visible world all around us.\* It has truly been called 'a series of worlds enfolded one within another.' Imagine, for instance, what it would have been had you never known the gift of sight. A whole world of colour, form, and beauty would be lying all around you, bathed in the glory of the summer sunshine, close at hand, but you would be cut off from all conception of it as completely as if it did not exist. To you it would be a sealed world. And as others spoke of it, and told of its glories, their words would sound to you but as idle tales,

\* For much of what follows I am indebted to a striking chapter on our Lord's Ascension into heaven in Maccoll's *Christianity in Relation to Science and Morals*.

so utterly would you be unable to realise it. So with the sense of hearing. Indeed, each sense admits us into a fresh world of experience of which we should know nothing but for the possession of that sense. This is powerfully shown in a modern work of fiction, which tells the story of a girl born blind and deaf and dumb.\* There she is, a living soul imprisoned in a human body, unable to hold intercourse with those about her, moving about in worlds not realised, cut off altogether from the world of sight, of sound, and of speech. And then, as God's finger touches her, and one by one her powers are given to her, as you read the tale, you feel how with the gift of each sense she is introduced into a new world of beautiful creations which opens out its treasures to her—a world which has been very close to her all the time, but from which she has been so completely cut off by impassable barriers that it has been to her an undiscovered country, while all others were in the fullest enjoyment of it. And then, again, beyond the region of the senses what worlds there are, into which some can penetrate at will, while to others the gate of entrance seems barred and locked for ever! The world of imagination, for instance: what a real world it is! What creative power there is in it! And yet how many are there who are totally incapable of entering into it! To one man there is revealed that which another cannot see, and, what is more, never can see. To poor Peter Bell in the poem

\* Hall Caine, *The Scapegoat*.

the 'primrose by the water's brim' is but 'a yellow primrose,' while to the poet who tells his tale

'The meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'\*

Or take the world of music. We can all hear the sounds, but to some they are sounds without meaning, and bear no message to the soul; while there are others amongst us who can sit down before some mighty organ and call its keys to their work, 'claiming each slave of the sound at a touch, at a wish of the soul.†' And lo! as their fingers stray over the notes of the instrument an entrance is opened to them into a world in which they can wander at will. The cares and worries of this lower earth have faded away into the dim distance. In an instant they are far away, lost in an experience of which others of us who lack that magic power can form no conception. In each case you see the world is there close at hand. It needs no change of place to admit us into it. That is the point to notice. No change of place is needed to enter into it, only a change of organism, only a change of self, the opening of the eyes and the unstopping of the ears.

And what if for admission into that spiritual world of which we have been thinking there be needed no change of place, but only a change of self—the opening of the eyes to spiritual truths, and the unstopping of the ears to those celestial voices which speak to those who

\* Wordsworth, *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, etc.

† Browning, *Abt Vogler*.

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have ears to hear as really as they ever did of old?

If we find it hard to realise the things of the spirit, and difficult to grasp as living realities the great truths of the Christian Creed, it may be that we are yet in the condition of one born blind and deaf, no change of environment needed, but only a change of organism, to admit us into that world of which others are already in the full enjoyment, for, Oh, sirs, it is indeed true that

‘Earth’s crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God ;  
But only he who *sees* takes off his shoes :  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.’\*

If, then, you ask this day to take up the prophet’s work, and to speak of GOD and the things of GOD, you, too, must have your visions of GOD, as prophets and seers of old had theirs.

Moses in the desert, Isaiah in the Temple, Ezekiel by the banks of the Chebar, St. John in the Isle of Patmos—of all these the eyes were opened so that they could see Him who is invisible, and, seeing Him, they could bring His Presence home to others. Shall we not, then, pray that GOD will open your eyes, and enable you to gain an ever clearer vision of those great verities of the unseen invisible world with which your ministry will ever have to do? Shall we not ask for the gift of *insight*, which alone can make you worthy to wear the prophet’s mantle, and prove you capable of receiving a double portion of the Spirit?

\* E. B. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*.

Those 'horses of fire and chariots of fire' which Elisha could see when his master was taken away from him were not visible once only and for an instant to him. Years afterwards, when he and his servant were in Dothan, and the hosts of the Syrians all around them, the young man was afraid, and said, 'Alas, master! what shall we do?' and the prophet bade him be of good courage, for, said he, 'they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, LORD, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened his eyes, and he saw that the mountain was full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about Elisha.'\* They had been there all the time, only the eye needed to be opened to see them. And *you*, if only your eyes are open, not to-day only, but all the days of your ministry—you shall know that 'the hosts of God encamp around the dwellings of the just,' and, knowing that, you will fear no evil. The more that the things of the spiritual world become real to you, the less will external things affect you personally, and the greater will be the power with which you will minister to others. Your whole life and ministry will be changed and transfigured. For yourself you will be rid of that restlessness and discontent which is the ruin of so many ministries, nor, on the other hand, will you sink into that state of contented dejection which takes the heart out of so many more. And with eyes open to the vision of the invisible, and ears that are quick to catch the lightest whisper

\* 2 Kings vi. 15-17.

of GOD's voice, you will go in and out among your people as ministering angels, with GOD's word on your lip and heaven's light in your eye. You will tell them of that world in which you are living, which you know by blessed experience, and into which they, too, may freely enter. They will come to know it, too, and to realise more and more how little, after all, the material conditions of living affect the *life*, until in the end it shall be with you and with them also as it was with one of whom I once read, whose story I give you exactly as I have read it. He, an old Scotchman, lived away in a wretched cottage out on the moors, and earned just sufficient to keep body and soul together by breaking stones. His wife died, his only child died, and he was left quite alone. At last he became quite blind. In the intervals of breaking stones he would gather together the wild shepherd boys from the moors, and tell them of the Good Shepherd, and the sheep that was lost and found. To that old man came a Christian minister. He spoke gently to him, and, thinking to console him for his hard lot, reminded him that it was not likely to last long, for, said he, you will soon be in heaven. The old man lifted his head and raised his eyes, as if their sightless balls could pierce the skies above him. 'In heaven, sir,' he answered — 'why, I've been there these ten years!'

\* See Teignmouth Shore, *St. George for England*.



## X

# The Book of Job

JOB xvii. 5: 'The light of the wicked shall be put out.'  
JOB. xxi. 17 (R.V.): 'How oft is it that the lamp of the wicked  
is put out?'

THE earlier of these passages occurs in a speech of Bildad, and the words are apparently a quotation from the Book of Proverbs, where they are found as a plain statement of the doctrine of retribution.† At their second occurrence in the Book of Job, where they form part of one of the speeches of Job himself, the slight change in the form of the verse as found in the Revised Version when compared with the Authorised Version indicates that the words are not a pious exclamation on the part of one who acquiesces in the statement, but rather that they contain the scornful question of one who repeats what had become a commonplace among religious persons, but is himself utterly unable to accept it. Thus the twice-repeated words may serve as a con-

\* For some of the matter of this and the following sermon I may perhaps be permitted to refer to my *Commentary on the Book of Job* (The Westminster Commentaries).

† Prov. xiii. 9, xxiv. 20.

venient summary of the positions taken by Job and his friends respectively in this wonderful book, a drama which is so full of teaching for us to-day, and yet so little studied as a whole, except by professed students of the Old Testament. In spite of the fact that everyone is familiar with the story as narrated in the first two chapters, and with a few of the finest passages in other parts, it will, I imagine, be readily granted that as a whole the book is but little known and studied. This is partly accounted for by the fact that as a whole it is never read in our churches. On but a single Sunday in the whole course of the year\* are the lessons drawn from it. In the morning service for one festival† six verses are read as the first lesson; and even when the book is read in the course of the daily lessons on weekdays during the summer months, no fewer than ten chapters are omitted altogether. But there has in the past been a further reason for the general neglect of the book. In the Authorised Version much of it was so hopelessly bewildering that no wonder men turned from it in despair. The publication, however, of the Revised Version in 1885 has completely removed this excuse. Where formerly all was dark and perplexing, it is now possible for the English reader to trace the course of the dialogue and to follow out the argument with comparative ease. Moreover, the last few years have seen the publication of various works which help us greatly towards a just estimate and a right

\* The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

† St. Thomas's Day.

understanding of the poem, foremost among them standing, perhaps, the writings of Dr. A. B. Davidson.

It is proposed, then, to consider here the positions occupied by Job and his friends in the central part of the work, and their bearing on the right attitude for us in the face of problems, different, perhaps, but no less perplexing to us than were those with which the actors in this great drama were confronted.

But first it will be well if we remind ourselves briefly of the structure and character of the book as a whole. It falls into five well-defined and clearly-marked divisions, the first and last of which are in ordinary prose, while the three between them, as may be seen from the arrangement of the text in parallel lines in the Revised Version, are in poetry. With the prologue in chapters i. and ii., describing the scene in heaven, the fourfold trial of Job, and introducing the *dramatis personæ*, we are all familiar, nor need we linger over it. The second part, chapters iii.-xxxi., contains the debate between Job and his friends. It is a dialogue constructed with consummate skill and exquisitely arranged. After Job's 'curse upon his day' in chapter iii., the speeches form three circles, each friend speaking in turn, and receiving his answer from Job before the next one takes up the charge. So the debate moves forward with perfect regularity through two complete circles.\* But in the third† the brevity of the speech of Bildad, the second

\* iv.-xiv. and xv.-xxi.

† xxii.-xxvi.

speaker of the three, in chapter xxv., and the way in which he can do little more than stammer out a few things which have already been said by a previous speaker, warns us that the friends have well-nigh exhausted their stock of argument; and accordingly it is no surprise to find that Zophar considers discretion the better part of valour, and misses his turn altogether, leaving Job as master of the field, to continue his discourse in the form of a monologue.\* After this, in the third part,† a new speaker, not previously mentioned, appears upon the scene in the person of Elihu. Dissatisfied with the arguments of the friends, and yet shocked at the utterances of Job, he intervenes by pointing out certain considerations with regard to suffering and its providential purposes which have apparently escaped the notice of both parties in the dialogue. This episode—whether it formed part of the original poem, or whether it is a subsequent addition by a later poet, we need not stop to inquire—occupies chapters xxxii.-xxxvii. And then in the fourth part‡ God Himself interposes. The Almighty answers Job out of the whirlwind, and overwhelms him with question after question designed to bring home to him the impossibility of his arguing with God, or understanding the whole scheme of Divine Providence. The result is that Job is completely humbled, and abases himself before God: ‘I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in

\* xxvii.-xxxi.

† xxxii.-xxxvii.

‡ xxxviii.-xlii. 6.

dust and ashes.' Finally, in the epilogue,\* which, like the prologue, is in prose, the story is brought to an end by the restoration of Job's prosperity : 'The LORD turned the captivity of Job, and gave him twice as much as he had before.'

Such is the outline of the book. Let us now confine our attention to the second part of it, the debate between Job and his friends.

And, first, what was the position maintained by the friends? In estimating this it must ever be borne in mind that they knew nothing whatever of that scene in heaven described in the prologue. The author of the book, by placing this in the forefront, has admitted us behind the scenes, and let us into the secret of Job's sufferings. They formed, as so many sufferings form to-day, a God-permitted Satanic temptation, allowed to test the patriarch's faith, and try whether his goodness was genuine, or whether his piety was, after all, but a subtle form of selfishness, a serving God for what he could get out of Him.

Of this neither the friends nor Job himself were aware. They only knew what they could see with the eye of sense. Here was a man who had lived in great prosperity, honoured and respected of all men, suddenly overwhelmed with calamity after calamity—his flocks and herds destroyed, his children dead, himself the victim of a most loathsome disease. What did it all mean? That was the problem before them. What have they got to say to it? Probably up to this time Job and his friends alike had acquiesced, without much

\* xlii. 7-17.

consideration, in what we might fairly call the orthodox theology of the day. The theory of suffering, which held the field in that ancient world to which the poem transports us, was a strict doctrine of exact retribution. Suffering was penal: it was the consequence of sin. Not content with a general view which would link the suffering of the race more or less closely with the sin of the race, there was a tendency to argue that in any individual case suffering was exactly meted out in proportion to individual sin; and thus it was natural to argue back from the existence of so much suffering, and infer the existence of so much previous sin as its cause. A notable sufferer, they said, must be a notable sinner.

The disposition thus to argue, though seldom confessed, has lingered on with marvellous vitality. You see it in the New Testament: 'There were some present who told Him of the Galilæans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. . . . Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered these things? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.'\* You may detect it to-day in that spirit of resentment which is sometimes aroused in a man who is overtaken by some grievous trouble or sickness. He takes it sorely to heart, and thinks it hard that he should be singled out thus to suffer. What has he done, he asks, to deserve it? He has a feeling that he is being unfairly dealt with, and this

\* Luke xiii. 1-3.

feeling, after all, can only come from the habit, in which he has acquiesced, of regarding suffering as the consequence of sin. Holding this doctrine, then, Job's friends are suddenly confronted with his case. What are they to make of it? Job was undoubtedly a great sufferer. Of that there was overwhelming evidence. The only theory known to them which would account for it was that Job had been secretly guilty of some great sin, for which he was now being chastised by God. True, his whole past life gave the lie to this notion. His goodness and uprightness had been a living epistle known and read of all men. But still, rather than question their theory, rather than give up their 'short and easy method,' they will shut their eyes to facts. It is not that they can't see, it is that they won't see. There is a difference of tone between them—one may be more courteous, more of a gentleman, another may be of a coarser type—but that is all. The main position taken up by all three is identical. Suffering is the punishment of sin. Job is a great sufferer; *therefore* Job is a great sinner. This argument underlies all their speeches—veiled at the outset, and only hinted at in the first circle, but at last stated nakedly, and applied to Job with relentless cruelty. In spite of all that Job has to urge against them, in spite of his appeal to facts, they cannot conceive that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in their philosophy. They have their theory, and if facts do not square with it, then so much the worse for facts. Nothing would induce them to admit that



‘the bed was shorter than a man could stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than he could wrap himself up in it.’\* They will not see that their theory was utterly inadequate to meet all the needs of the whole case. We, as we read the book, with the fuller knowledge that the ages have brought, and the deeper insight that comes from a larger revelation of God’s mind and purpose, can see clearly enough that though their theory contained much truth, yet as a theory it was utterly inadequate, because it failed to cover the whole ground. True that some suffering is penal, and is the direct consequence of sin. We see it every day of our lives; but true, too, that this does not hold good of all suffering. Some, as the prologue to Job reminds us, is permitted by God to test us. Life, as Bishop Butler puts it, is a ‘time of probation.’ Some, as Elihu suggests in his speeches, is designed, not only for probation, but, to use Butler’s phraseology again, for ‘moral discipline and improvement,’ so that man may not only be *proved*, but also *improved* by it. Some still remains mysterious and shrouded in darkness. Perhaps the whole mystery of suffering is insoluble by us in our present condition; and whatever advances we make in knowledge, there will still be much which, as the speeches of the Almighty out of the whirlwind tell us, we cannot hope to understand unless we can comprehend the whole mind of God. Some—and here the Book of Job prepares the way for Christianity by stopping short and contain-

\* Isa. xxviii. 20.

ing no hint of this—is vicarious, as in the highest and most unique sense the sufferings of Him who gave His life on the cross for us, Whose sufferings are to be in some sense repeated in His members, even as an Apostle could say that he ‘filled up what was wanting of the afflictions of CHRIST in his flesh, for His body’s sake, which is the Church.’\* But to all these further considerations the friends are blind. Nothing can shake their adherence to the theory with which they started. Here is the conclusion at which Eliphaz, the most thoughtful and the most considerate of the three, arrives, inventing crimes wholesale, and laying them to Job’s account, as the true explanation of his misfortunes.

‘Is not thy wickedness great?

Neither is there any end to thine iniquities.

For thou hast taken pledges of thy brother for nought,

And stripped the naked of their clothing.

Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink,

And thou hast withholden bread from the hungry.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thou hast sent widows empty away,

And the arms of the fatherless have been broken.

Therefore snares are round about thee,

And sudden fear troubleth thee;

Or darkness that thou canst not see;

And abundance of waters cover thee.†

Let us leave the arguments of the friends, and turn to consider the position taken up by Job himself. Probably up to the time when his troubles fell upon him he, like the others, had acquiesced in the orthodox doctrine of the day. It was a doctrine which did well enough for fine

\* Col. i. 24.

† Job. xxii. 5-11.

weather, and for other people. So long as he was prosperous himself, he could lightly acquiesce in the view that the suffering of others somehow stood to their sin in the relation of effect to cause. But now he himself is exposed to the 'pelting of the pitiless storm.' Stroke after stroke beats down remorselessly upon him, and he feels that the old doctrine of retribution has broken down hopelessly in his case. He is not an exceptionally great sinner, nor has he done anything to deserve exceptionally severe treatment as a punishment. On this point his conscience is perfectly clear. The old doctrine must go. It has broken down hopelessly. But he has nothing to set in its place. The old theory must go; but the pain and pathos of the situation is that he cannot explain the facts which are thus forced upon his notice. He knows for his own part that his suffering is not a consequence of his sin. He can point to evidences in the world around him, such as the misfortunes into which good men fall, and the prosperity of the violent and rapacious, which give the lie to his friends' explanation. They had maintained that 'the light of the wicked shall be put out.' He turns on them with bitterness in his tone:

'How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out?  
 That their calamity cometh upon them?  
 That God distributeth sorrows in His anger?  
 That they are as stubble before the wind,  
 And as chaff that the storm carrieth away?

\* \* \* \* \*

Their seed is established with them in their sight,  
 And their offspring before their eyes.  
 Their houses are safe from fear,

Neither is the rod of God upon them.  
 Their bull gendereth and faileth not ;  
 Their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf.  
 They send forth their little ones like a flock,  
 And their children dance.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

Have ye not asked them that go by the way ?  
 And do ye know their tokens ?  
 That the evil man is spared in the day of calamity ?  
 That they are led away in the day of wrath ?\*

He can see now clearly enough that such facts are incompatible with the view that he has hitherto accepted. But beyond this, at first, he cannot go. He has nothing to set in the place of the old inadequate theory. He knows no considerations that can help him to bear his sufferings patiently—and oh, the misery of his condition ! GOD is treating him as His enemy, setting him up as a mark for His arrows, and there is none to tell the reason why. What conception can he form of GOD but that He is aimlessly cruel and wantonly capricious ? And so the temptation comes home to him to which Satan had suggested that He was sure to yield, and which his own wife had urged on him : ‘ Renounce GOD and die.’ Yes, ‘ Renounce GOD ’ ; and very striking the phrase is, if it be indeed true that the word gains this meaning from the benediction given at parting—‘ Renounce GOD,’ bid farewell to Him, and have nothing more to say to Him at all. That was the temptation, and a sore one it was. But it was just here that Job stood firm. Appearances were against GOD, but Job would

\* xxi. 17-30 ; see R.V., margin.

trust Him in spite of appearances, certain that there must be some explanation, if only he could find it. Whatever happened he would never bid farewell to Him, and it was this that brought him through the storm and stress. He might say wild and unjustifiable things about God, he might have hard thoughts about Him, but the one thing which he would not do was to 'renounce God' altogether. No, 'not even when the whirl was worst,' for through it all he feels that if he could only get at God Himself, if he could only come and speak with Him face to face, and plead his cause, and demand an answer, all would be well.

'Only do not two things unto me,  
Then will I not hide myself from Thy face :  
Withdraw Thine hand far from me ;  
And let not Thy terror make me afraid.  
Then call Thou, and I will answer ;  
Or let me speak, and answer Thou me.'\*

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*

'Oh that I knew where I might find Him,  
That I might come even to His seat !  
I would order my cause before Him,  
And fill my mouth with arguments.  
I would know the words which He would answer me,  
And understand what He would say unto me.  
Would He contend with me in the greatness of His power ?  
Nay ; but He would give heed unto me.  
There the upright might reason with Him ;  
So should I be delivered for ever from my Judge.'†

And so, as he clings to this, gradually one consideration after another breaks in upon him. There is borne into his soul the thought of a day

\* xiii. 20-22.

† xxiii. 3-7.

wherein present inequalities shall hereafter be righted, and there comes home to him the certainty that 'at the last' God will 'stand up' as his 'Vindicator,' and make his righteousness manifest, and that somehow—whether 'in the flesh' or 'out of the flesh,' who shall say?—but that somehow he shall gain the vision for which he yearns, and himself shall 'see GOD.\*' And these thoughts bring a calmer tone to his words. After the great climax in chapter xix., you feel that his passion has largely spent itself. Though to the last he has no 'cut-and-dried' theory of his own to put in the place of the old one which he has demolished by his appeal to facts, yet before the dialogue is ended the feeling of soreness has to a great extent passed away. In his later utterances you are conscious that the fury of the storm is over, though he longs as wistfully as ever for GOD to manifest Himself and lift the veil that hangs over the enigmas of life, and thus

'He came at length  
To find a stronger faith his own;  
And power was with him in the night,  
Which makes the darkness and the light,  
And dwells not in the light alone,  
But in the darkness and the cloud.'†

Such is, in brief, the position taken by the two parties in the discussion that we have been considering. It is very easy for us to use hard words about the stupidity and short-sightedness

\* xix. 25-27.

† Tennyson, *In Memoriam*; xcv.

of Job's friends ; but before we abuse them or condemn them too harshly it may be well to make quite certain that our own attitude towards the problems that come before us is never similar to theirs. To those of us who have passed our youth there can be no question but that it oftentimes needs an effort if we are not mentally to assume the position of these three men, even if we succeed in avoiding the use of arrogant and harsh language such as theirs. 'I am verily persuaded that the LORD has more truth yet to come for us, yet to break forth out of His holy word.' This was the noble saying of the first of the pilgrim fathers. We can scarcely question its truth theoretically. But practically it is not easy to admit it in any given case. How increasingly hard we find it as we grow older to give a patient and candid consideration to anything that cuts across our preconceived ideas, or to examine with perfect fairness whether alleged facts of which we have hitherto taken no account be indeed facts ! It is not so only with questions of theology, but with other matters as well. In one of Charles Darwin's letters to Sir Charles Lyell there is a playful expression of a wish that all scientific men over sixty years of age could be suppressed, as they would be certain to oppose any new theory. And yet, by the condemnation passed upon these men, we are surely taught to be ready to enlarge our views of God's working, whether in nature or revelation, when new and hitherto unobserved facts are brought to light. We are bidden to take as our motto that of the greatest of artists



in his old age of fame,' 'I am still learning.' It has been finely said that 'openness to conviction is the mark of religious sincerity,' and certainly a resolute determination to be at all costs true to facts is the only right spirit for those who claim to be followers of Him who is the Truth as well as the Way and the Life.

On the other hand, in the days of comparative youth, the lessons taught by the case of Job himself are perhaps more generally needed. No man ever yet passed from childhood to manhood without having much for which he had never allowed brought prominently before him. Not to mention theories, opinions, ideas, inferences, for which there may or may not be a good deal to be urged, it is certain that from time to time there will be plenty of stubborn facts brought under his notice, which he will find hard to reconcile with the views, whatever they may be, of life and religion to which he has been accustomed. It is possible, of course, for him to take up the attitude of Job's comforters, and doggedly shut his eyes to them all, and grow no wiser as he grows older. But certainly with many of us in early life the tendency is rather to run into the opposite extreme, and throw over every belief the first time it is seriously challenged. With the opening of our horizon difficult problems are sure to press upon us. They lie in our path thick as leaves in Vallombrosa sometimes. So the man finds his boyhood's faith is questioned, and the temptation to 'renounce God' and take no account of Him in his life comes home to him as it did to Job.

He is tempted to let go his hold on the means of grace, to give up prayer, and practically to live 'without GOD in the world.' It is the old temptation, and a sore one it is to many. But let it be met with Job's determination to cling to GOD, to trust Him in spite of all, to be absolutely true to facts, to tell out candidly to GOD all that is in the mind, instead of letting the vague doubts crystallise into definite unbelief through suppression, and then it shall have the same ending that it had in his case. Job's difficulties were never fully removed, but just because he would never 'renounce GOD' and let go his hold upon Him he came through them, and reached a position in which he could acquiesce in knowing only 'in part'; and so it may be with us. And, after all, that such trials as these should come upon us is only what we ought to expect, and the outcome of them may be a stronger faith, and one that is more worthy of the name than much which often passes current as such among us. We have recently been reminded in the posthumous publication of a great teacher that 'beliefs worth calling beliefs must be purchased by the sweat of the brow.\*' There are some, maybe, for whom the price of such true beliefs is even a 'sweat of blood.' But if it be true that 'through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven,†' we can scarcely complain if we find by experience that no step onward in the Church's

\* F. J. A. Hort, *The Way, the Truth, and the Life*, p. xxxiv.

† Acts xiv. 22.

advance into the kingdom of God's truth can be won without loss and pain.

There come times of exceptional trial and perplexity to all. The difficulties need not be intellectual. It may be that some temptation long resisted has overcome us, and we are miserable and dejected, tempted to give up, and say that 'it's no use trying.' It may be that some crushing sorrow has fallen upon us, which seems to 'take the spring out of the year.' It may simply be that GOD seems to hide His face from us, and we fancy that we get no help and no support from our prayers. A horror of great darkness overwhelmed the soul of the Redeemer Himself as He hung upon the cross, and forced from His white lips that most mysterious cry, 'My GOD, My GOD, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

Whatever form the trial may take when such hours come, and the temptation to give up everything—to 'renounce GOD,' and to let go our hold upon Him—is borne in upon our souls, then let us lay to heart the lesson of this wonderful book—the lesson of trust in spite of difficulties, the determination not to let go our hold upon the hand of GOD, and the assured conviction that if we only cling to Him, 'at the last' He will 'stand up' for us as our Vindicator and Redeemer, and all shall be well.

'Through waves and clouds and storms  
His power will clear thy way :  
Wait thou His time—the darkest night  
Shall end in brightest day.'

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\* Matt. xxvii. 46.

## XI

### The True Wisdom for Man

JOB xxviii. 28 : 'The fear of the LORD, that is wisdom ; and to depart from evil is understanding.'

THERE can scarcely be a single person who is incapable of feeling the wonderful beauty of the chapter of which these words form the close. But I fancy that a good many of those who listen to it have very vague ideas of its meaning. Single verses strike on the ear and stir them with a strange sense of spiritual power, but as a piece of literature, as a connected argument, as a description of facts, it is incomprehensible to the majority of those who hear or read it. And so it must remain as long as persons are content to use the Authorised Version alone, and decline to avail themselves of the help which the Revised Version can give. There may be, and I think that there are, substantial reasons against substituting the latter for the former for public reading in church as an ordinary rule, but there are none against following the lessons in it privately, so as to note the variations as they occur ; and there are none against the use of it for devotional purposes at home. Its

value may be illustrated in a remarkable way from the first eleven verses of this chapter, for there are few passages in the Old Testament in which the gain to the English reader from the possession of the Revised Version is greater. For the first time these verses are made intelligible to him, and without the need of having recourse to a commentary the thoughtful reader can now discover for himself to what the passage refers. It is a wonderfully vivid and graphic description of mining operations as carried on in the ancient world. In very early days copper-mines were worked in the peninsula of Sinai; gold-mines were worked in Nubia; and from Edom copper, and possibly also both gold and silver, could be procured; while in Lebanon there were ironworks and iron-mines. With some, if not all, of these the writer of the Book of Job must have been familiar, for the picture contained in this chapter of the miners descending in their cages, swinging to and fro, is evidently drawn from life. Thus he tells us how the treasures of silver, gold, iron and brass, are all yielded up to man, who can search out the very darkest recesses of the earth. He sinks the shafts of his mines, and men descend into the bowels of the earth, far from the haunts of their fellows. On the earth's surface he grows his corn, which supplies him with food, while far down below he is ransacking its treasures, its gold and precious stones, and searching it as by fire. No falcon's eye is keen enough to spy out those hidden recesses, and no beast of prey can make his way thither. Man alone has the skill to

dig down to the very roots of the mountains, and hew out his passages in the solid rocks, binding up the streams so that they shall not flood his mines, and bringing out the hidden treasures to the light of day. That, broadly, is a paraphrase of the whole passage, and with this sketch of its general drift in your mind listen to the verses as they stand in the Revised Version :

‘Surely there is a mine for the silver,  
And a place for gold which they refine.  
Iron is taken out of the earth,  
And brass is molten out of the stone.  
Man setteth an end to darkness,  
And searcheth out to the furthest bound  
The stones of thick darkness and of the shadow of death.  
He breaketh open a shaft away from where men sojourn ;  
They are forgotten of the foot that passeth by ;  
They hang afar from men, they swing to and fro.  
As for the earth, out of it cometh bread :  
And underneath it is turned up as it were by fire.  
The stones thereof are the place of sapphires,  
And it hath dust of gold.  
That path no bird of prey knoweth,  
Neither hath the falcon’s eye seen it :  
The proud beasts have not trodden it,  
Nor hath the fierce lion passed thereby.  
He (*i.e.*, man) putteth forth his hand upon the flinty  
rock ;  
He overturneth the mountains by the roots.  
He cutteth out channels among the rocks ;  
And his eye seeth every precious thing.  
He bindeth the streams that they trickle not ;  
And the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light.’

Is there not a meaning now in the words which was wanting before? Take the verses by themselves as I have read them, and you see at once

that they contain a description of the miner's work which for vividness and picturesqueness is without a parallel in the whole range of ancient literature. But even when you have discovered this you have still to see why the description is introduced here, and what relation it bears to the rest of the chapter, which is even more familiar to most persons through Boyce's famous anthem taken from it: 'Oh, where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?' The connection between the two parts of the chapter is really very close, and it is something of this sort. The description of mining operations is introduced in order to illustrate the extraordinary skill and power of man. He is able by his restless and resistless energy to force the earth to disclose its secrets, and to yield up its hidden treasures. He can discover silver, gold, sapphires, precious stones of all kinds—everything, in fact, that man holds most desirable, with one exception. There is one thing which baffles man in his search after it, which he can neither purchase nor discover. One thing for which he will search in the depths and in the sea in vain. One thing for which he may offer all the treasures of Arabia and India, but its price is far above them all, and that is the true and heavenly wisdom. Neither man nor beast can descry it, neither death nor destruction can help to its discovery. They know nothing but a rumour of it. It is only God on high who possesses any true knowledge of it. *He* knows it and can descry it, for His eye ranges over all things. It is He who at Creation weighed the



winds and measured out the waters. He it is who has ordered the laws which govern the rain, and created the thunder and the lightning. And when He thus ordered Creation wisdom was present to Him ; He declared it, gave it existence, and contemplated it in all its fulness with Divine approval.

And what, then, shall man do if, clever and cunning as he is, and able to find out many inventions, they all fail him here in the presence of the great Mystery, and he can never attain to the true wisdom or comprehend completely the principles that rule the world? Is he abandoning the search in despair, and giving up the problem as insoluble, to yield himself up without restraint to the sensual pleasures of the moment, to follow the old Epicurean advice, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die'? Nay, indeed, says the ancient sage, and his words ring out with a note of truth that is undying ; man has his wisdom, but it is of a *practical* rather than an intellectual nature. And so GOD's word comes home to him. Unto man He said, 'The fear of the LORD, that is wisdom : and to depart from evil is understanding.' That, he seems to tell us, is, after all, the highest and the only true wisdom for man. As the words stand in the Book of Job, they may seem almost a counsel of despair. Job has been bewildered and driven nearly mad by the perplexities of existence, and the hopelessness of the endeavour to discover any principles of GOD's providence in the ordering of the world and the distribution of good and evil. It is all a hopeless

tangle, and he can find no clue to it. And now it seems as if he was told to abandon the search for any solution of the problem. It is incomprehensible, and man had better cease thinking about it. This may seem to be the adoption of a position not very far removed from the agnosticism of the present day, and it is one which no Christian teacher could consent to adopt as a permanent one, for it amounts to a recommendation to cease thinking. But as a temporary relief there are probably times in the life of most persons when it will appear to be the best course for them to follow. Voltaire's 'Work without reasoning; it is the only way to make life endurable,' may sometimes be the rule even for a Christian. For a man who is endowed by GOD with powers of reason and intellect deliberately to abstain from using them, and to turn away from any endeavour to find an answer to perplexing questions concerning the Divine government of the world, cannot be right as a permanent condition. But as J. H. Newman has pointed out in a famous sermon,\* there are some trials of faith which are best met by simple obedience, which is GOD's remedy for religious perplexity; and when men are bewildered and puzzled and doubtful about the very foundations of religion, they will often, by leaving speculation and turning to active work in the course of plain duty, find that in time their perplexities disappear and the difficulties solve themselves. 'It is, indeed,' he says, 'very painful to be haunted by

\* 'Obedience the Remedy for Religious Perplexity': Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. i.

wondering doubts, to have thoughts shoot across the mind about the reality of religion altogether, or of this or that particular doctrine of it, or about the correctness of one's own faith and the safety of one's own state.' But it must be right to obey, and it is often best to turn away resolutely from the contemplation of these doubts and difficulties, and just go on quietly doing the duty that lies immediately before us. 'To be dutiful and obedient in ordinary matters, to speak the truth, to be honest, to be sober, to keep from sinful words and thoughts, to be kind and forgiving for our Saviour's sake—let us attempt these duties first. They even will be difficult, the least of them; still, they are much easier than the solution of the doubts which harass us, and they will by degrees give us a practical knowledge of the truth,' for we shall find in time that somehow or other, while we have been quietly doing our duty and obeying our LORD's commands, our difficulties have been removed and our perplexities have disappeared. 'The fear of the LORD, that is wisdom: and to depart from evil is understanding.'

The words, then, may come to us as a reminder of the proper course to be followed in times of exceptional strain and difficulty. But over and above this, they have a constant value as the expression of a grand truth which needs to be always kept steadily before us, and of which no age ever stood in greater need than the present—the truth, that is, of the supremacy of goodness, and the superiority of moral and spiritual to intellectual gifts. Is there no danger, not simply

of profaning whatever gifts of intellect God may have given us, and of turning them to mean and unworthy uses, but also of deliberately thinking that the possession of specially brilliant gifts carries with it diminished responsibilities and larger license in regard to the great questions of right and wrong? Have we not all seen at some time or other men who seemed to think that by reason of the greatness of their gifts and their intellectual superiority they were dispensed from the obligations of the moral law which they admitted to be binding on smaller men, while the world has complacently acquiesced in their view, and condoned the evil which they scorned to hide, because it so admired the brilliancy of their talents? Alas! such cases occur too frequently in every age for it to be needless to remind you that being clever and having knowledge does not, and never can, make up for not caring to be good. Rather,

‘Be good . . . and let who will be clever,  
And so make life, death, and that vast forever  
One grand sweet song.’\*

‘The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.’

I have already alluded to a famous sermon of Dr. Newman’s on ‘Obedience the Remedy for Religious Perplexity.’ Let me end by referring to one by Newman’s greatest disciple, the late Dean Church, on the point which I am now pressing—

\* C. Kingsley, ‘A Farewell’: *Andromeda and other Poems*  
p. 64.

‘the Supremacy of Goodness.’ The Dean was not a man to underrate the value of intellectual gifts, nor was he disposed to think lightly of their claim on our homage, but he reminds us, in words which are among the noblest ever uttered from the pulpit of a great University church, the very home of learning, that ‘intellectual strength and fertility cannot be the summit of human nature,’ or ‘the highest and most precious of man’s possessions and attainments.’ ‘It is a great thing,’ he says, ‘to have lived like Kepler and Faraday, with such magnificent achievements, with such purity and simplicity of soul, with such enthusiasm for duty and work, and that noble humility which means the deep and wide sense of truth and reality. But there will always be the few and the many, and such privilege cannot be for the many. Yet there is a blessedness higher than to be able to bequeath the wealth of Shakespeare and Bacon. We may all of us, by God’s unspeakable blessing and help, add to the world’s goodness if we cannot add to its knowledge. We may, one and all of us, the least as well as the highest, do our part in that which is the chief work of God’s rule and discipline over us now, the growth and victory of the spirit and mind of CHRIST. We may all of us have laid our single and unnoticed stone where the future of God’s holy kingdom is slowly rising, while He patiently but certainly fulfils His purposes. We may leave when we go hence no name and no remembrance; but it rests with everyone whether he shall leave what is better than name and remembrance.

When He who gave us our life calls for it again we can leave, as an offering on the altar of the GOD of our souls, the GOD of all the worlds, the offering of a life lived in His light, ruled by His charity, humbly and thankfully resigned when it is time to give it up; a life rescued by repentance and self-discipline from folly and sin, from sloth and emptiness; a life of duty, loyal and industrious, sincere and patient; a life in which we sought by His help to draw near to His goodness, to love and to follow it, as its glory is shown to men in the face of JESUS CHRIST.\*

\* *Human Life and its Conditions*, p. 28 et seq.

## XII

### The Eighteenth Psalm

Ps. xviii. 1 : 'I will love Thee, O LORD, my strength : the LORD is my stony rock and my defence.'

THE eighteenth psalm is entitled in our Bibles 'a Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.' And, whatever we may think of the value of the titles in general, there is no reasonable ground for questioning the truth of this one.

The great antiquity of the psalm is guaranteed by the fact that it is actually quoted in the book of the prophet Micah, who lived in Hezekiah's time,\* and an additional evidence of the correctness of the title is supplied by the fact that the psalm reappears as the work of David in 2 Samuel, where it is given in full in chapter xxii. And therefore, in spite of doubts occasionally expressed by some writers, we may, on purely critical grounds, feel pretty confident that the tradition which

\* Cf. Micah vii. 17 with verse 46. It may also be noticed that Hab. iii. 19 seems to be based on verse 34.



connects this psalm with the name of David is trustworthy, and that it is a genuine work of the sweet Psalmist of Israel whose name it bears.

It may be assigned to the comparatively early days of David's reign and prosperity—after his victorious wars and military successes described in 2 Sam. viii. and x., and before that strange, sad fall which forms the subject of chapter xii., and which cast such a dark shadow over his closing years. David has reached the highest point in his prosperity, and is at the summit of his greatness. The LORD has delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. What a contrast between his past and his present! He looks back and lets his eye run over his experiences in those years of wandering, when he was hunted like a partridge upon the mountains. He thinks of those hairbreadth escapes: the javelin which shivered past him and quivered in the wall at his back, Saul's messengers watching the house, his flight by the window, his life as an outlaw, the days spent in the cave, the feigned madness at the Court of Achish, the many occasions when there seemed but a step between him and death.

Since then he has

‘Lived to clutch the golden keys,  
To mould a mighty State's decrees’;

he has become

‘on Fortune's crowning slope  
The pillar of a people's hope,  
The centre of a world's desire.’\*

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\* Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, lxiv.

And now, as he looks back over it all, he can see clearly enough that it is to no merit of his own that he owes it. The hand of GOD is manifest everywhere, guiding, guarding, protecting him. It was to this, and this alone, that he owed his preservation ; through it, and it alone, was he able to 'breast the blows of circumstance,' and therefore he will pour out his heart in gratitude to GOD, who has delivered him, and will break forth into this noble psalm of thanksgiving, in which he reviews his past experiences, and condenses his manifold deliverances into a single scene, painting them with matchless skill as some great Theophany or visible manifestation of GOD.

This requires, perhaps, some further explanation.

In order, then, to understand the meaning of the psalm, and the imagery employed in it, it must be remembered that on almost the first page of Israel's history there stood the account of the manifestation of GOD at Sinai after the Exodus, when 'there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the Mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud . . . and Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire ; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly, and the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai to the top of the Mount.'\*

The Jew never forgot that scene. It influenced his thoughts and coloured his conceptions all through his national history. It stood as the

\* Exod. xix. 16-20.

very type and model of a Divine manifestation and deliverance, so that in after years, whenever there was any special deliverance wrought by God, or any signal interposition on behalf of His people, it was at once recognised as a fresh manifestation of that power which had shone forth on Sinai; and by a very natural process it was idealised and described poetically and figuratively as if there had been a similar visible appearance, as the Almighty came down to save His own.

So you find it in the Song of Deborah :

‘LORD, when Thou wentest forth out of Seir,  
When Thou marchedst out of Edom,  
The earth trembled : the heavens also dropped,  
Yea, the clouds dropped water.  
The mountains flowed down at the presence of the LORD,  
Even as Sinai at the presence of the LORD the GOD of  
Israel.’\*

The same strain is repeated in Psalm lxxviii., and we catch its echoes in the song of the prophet Habakkuk :

‘GOD came from Teman,  
And the Holy One from Mount Paran.  
His glory covered the heavens,  
And the earth was full of His praise.  
And His brightness was as the light ;  
He had rays coming forth from His hand.  
And there was the hiding of His power.  
Before Him went the pestilence,  
And fiery bolts went forth at His feet.  
And the eternal mountains were scattered,  
The everlasting hills did bow.’†

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\* Judg. v. 4, 5.

† Hab. iii. 3-6.

Here are just the same references to physical phenomena. The manifestation is made through the storm, the lightning, the thunder, and the earthquake. So is it also in the psalm before us. David is idealising his actual experiences and condensing them into one grand majestic scene, describing how God came down to the rescue of His servant as He came down of old on Sinai, and how all nature was moved at His coming. Study the eighteenth psalm with this thought in your mind, and the general drift of it will at once become clear, especially when you have corrected two unfortunate mistakes of translation in the Prayer-Book version—that version with which we are most familiar, so matchless in its musical rhythm and cadences, and yet often so unhappily inexact in its renderings.

The mistakes are these : (1) By translating the verbs in verses 5 and 6, and again in 16 and 17, as futures instead of pasts—‘I will call,’ ‘so shall He hear my voice,’ ‘He shall send down’—the Prayer-Book version hides from us the fact that it is but a single scene which is set before us in the whole passage which stretches right away from the 3rd to the 19th verse ; and (2) owing to the use of the terms ‘the sorrows of death’ and ‘the pains of hell’ in verses 3 and 4, the figure which the Psalmist really employs is altogether lost. The revisers of 1885 render ‘the cords of death compassed me. . . . The cords of Sheol (or Hades) were round about me ; the snares of death came upon me.’ Do you see the significance of the change ? Death and hell, or Hades (which

the Hebrews termed Sheol), are personified, as they are in Dürer's famous picture. They are regarded as hunters with 'cords,' and 'snares' or traps. It is no ignoble quarry for which their snares are spread. They are hunters of men. David himself is represented as entangled in their nets, bound by their cords, by which they are dragging him away (as the hunter drags off his quarry from the forest) down to the underworld beneath, where Death reigns supreme as king. That underworld is pictured, as always, in the bowels of the earth. Bound hand and foot, David is dragged down to the depths. The floods are fast overwhelming him. He is at his last gasp. But, as he himself tells us afterwards,

'In my distress I called upon the LORD,  
And cried unto my GOD.'

His cry penetrates to the heavenly temple, and reaches the ear of GOD.

'He heard my voice out of His temple :  
And my cry before Him came into His ears.'

At once GOD interposes—comes down to save His servant, as He had come down on Sinai.

'Then the earth shook and trembled,  
The foundations also of the hills moved  
And were shaken, because He was wroth.  
There went up a smoke out of His nostrils,  
And fire out of His mouth devoured :  
Coals were kindled by it.  
He bowed the heavens also, and came down ;  
And darkness was under His feet.'

What a picture it is of the descent of the Almighty ! The whole Theophany is vividly set before us in the following verses, the spirit of which is somehow wonderfully caught in the old metrical version of Sternhold and Hopkins, which, in spite of obvious faults, has an undying charm for some of us :

‘ The LORD descended from above,  
And bowed the heavens high ;  
And underneath His feet He cast  
The darkness of the sky.  
On cherubs and on cherubims  
Full royally He rode,  
And on the wings of all the winds  
Came flying all abroad.’

One seems to see the whole scene. The Almighty comes down. His voice is heard in the roll of the thunder. The storm-cloud and lightnings are the tokens of His presence.

‘ He sent out His arrows, and scattered them ;  
Yea, lightnings manifold, and discomfited them.

Death and hell abandon their prey and flee in terror. The floods of waters recoil, and are driven back so that the very roots of the mountain are laid bare, as GOD follows in quest of His servant.

‘ Then the channels of waters appeared,  
And the foundations of the world were laid bare,  
At Thy rebuke, O LORD,  
At the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils.’

And David, who was being dragged down to the depths and overwhelmed by the surging

waters, is rescued and drawn out and set at liberty.

‘He sent down from on high, He took me ;  
He drew me out of many waters.  
He delivered me from my strong enemy,  
And from them that hated me, for they were too mighty for me.  
They came upon me in the day of my calamity :  
But the LORD was my stay.  
He brought me forth also into a large place ;  
He delivered me, because He delighted in me.’

You see it all now ; and what a wonderful picture it is of the deliverance wrought by GOD for the man who has trusted Him and called on Him for help ! There is nothing of its kind to equal it anywhere else in literature. All mercies since those boyish days, when the LORD had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear, or since the hour when in the first flush of youthful excitement and enthusiasm he had volunteered, boy as he was, to go forth to meet the Philistine who defied the armies of Israel—all mercies and deliverances since then, countless though they be, are fore-shortened and brought into one in the retrospect of years, and are set before us as the work of GOD alone.

This, then, is the subject of verses 3 to 19 of the psalm. In the following verses, 20 to 31, David dwells on the reasons why GOD thus interposed on his behalf. It is because he has kept the ways of the LORD, and not forsaken his GOD, as the wicked doth. ‘Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His



eyesight.' God, he tells us, deals with men according as their heart is toward Him. His is not a solitary case: it is only one instance of a general law. 'The holy and perfect find God holy and perfect. To the froward He seems perverse. Their way is not God's way, and therefore they find themselves checked and thwarted at every turn. So it had been with David's predecessor on the throne of Israel. So long as Saul's will was in harmony with God's will the Spirit of the LORD was with him. When Saul fell away, and set his will against God's will, then the Spirit of God became to him evil, and troubled him. In the picturesque phrase of the Hebrews, 'the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.' No spirit from the LORD can be morally and essentially evil. But to a man who makes good evil and evil good, the Spirit of the LORD will necessarily appear evil, and will become evil to him—not morally and essentially evil, I repeat, but evil in the sense of opposing his perverse and wilful desires. That is what had happened with Saul, whereas with David, who had ever striven humbly and patiently to serve God, and to submit his will to God's will, God showed Himself holy and perfect. It is a profound truth that is here set before us. God deals with men as they deal with Him.

'With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful;  
 With the perfect man Thou wilt show Thyself perfect;  
 With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure;  
 And with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward.'

Bold and startling words they are, but as true to-day as ever they were. It lies in the nature of GOD that it must be so. You may see the truth exemplified every day of your life. Wherever law reigns it holds good, and law, as we know, has 'her seat in the bosom of GOD.'\* Take the laws of Nature—GOD's laws, you will all admit. Obey them, and you find that Nature is kindly and beneficent; she yields up her secrets to you, and is content to serve you, and do your bidding. Set yourself against them, and at once all things about you seem perverse. Forget them and ignore them, and disaster follows. The fire which you had utilised and pressed into your service, and which yielded ready obedience to your will, becomes at once a destructive force, to consume you and sweep you in an instant from the face of the earth. So with the laws of orderly government in the world. To the peaceable and law-abiding citizen they have no terrors. To him they come in the guise of a friendly power. He looks to them for shelter and protection from wrong and violence, and appeals to them to be the champion of the weak and down-trodden. But to the lawless man, to the house-breaker and the murderer, they are indeed perverse. Law is to him an enemy. It opposes him, thwarts him, and stands in his path at every turn.† So, whether GOD is working through Nature, or through the powers which he has ordained on earth, or however He may be working, the truth holds good.

\* Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, book i., chap. xvi.

† Cf. Phillips Brooks, *Twenty Sermons*, p. 302.

It is either the case that David's own experience is ours—'with the holy He shows Himself holy'; or the tragedy of Saul's life repeats itself—'with the perverse He shows Himself froward.'

In the remainder of the psalm there is little to detain us. In the verses that follow David describes more in detail the military successes and general prosperity of his reign, acknowledging again the dependence of his fortunes upon God, tracing every blessing he has received to Him alone, and pouring out his heart in adoring love and gratitude for them.

And here it is in this thought, with which he begins and to which he recurs at the close, that the psalm touches us so nearly. For, after all, the experience of David described in it is an experience which is repeated in the lives of all who trust in God and call upon Him for deliverance. Each one of us here, if only he has eyes to see, must be able to recall time after time in the past when he was entangled in the meshes of the nets which Satan had spread for him, when the cords were bound round him by which he was being dragged away down to the depths; and he knows as he looks back that it was nothing short of an interposition by God Himself that saved him and brought him to the place of liberty where he now stands. And yet, how little has he thought of it! How scanty has been his acknowledgment of it to God! The Jewish king, with privileges far less than ours, living under a preparatory dispensation, may yet put to shame many of us, who, with the full knowledge of all that has been

done for us by the redemption wrought on Calvary, and of all that is still being done for us by that love which has watched over us from our cradle, yet fail altogether to render to our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier the tribute of praise and thanksgiving which is due. It is mainly in order to help us in this matter that the psalms are given so prominent a place in our service. When in the sixteenth century the Puritans raised against our Prayer-Book the complaint that there was a lack of particular thanksgiving in it, Richard Hooker, in answer to the objection, pointed out that 'lest God should be any way unglorified, the greatest part of our daily service consisteth, according to the blessed Apostle's own precise rule, in much variety of psalms and hymns, for no other purpose, but only that out of so plentiful a treasure there might be for every man's heart to choose out his own sacrifice, and offer to God what fitteth best the often occasions' he 'may seem to have.'\*

Such a psalm as this may well be taken by everyone and applied either to his own circumstances or to those of the Church at large. He will find it suit either equally well. May we, then, all endeavour to enter more and more into the spirit of those psalms, the words of which are so familiar, the meaning so sadly little known ; and may they become more and more the expression of our love to and dependence on Him who is still to us what He was to David, our Strength, our Rock, and our Defence.

\* *Ecclesiastical Polity*, book v., chap. xviii. 3.

### XIII

## Nature and Revelation

Ps. xix. 1, 7: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. . . . The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.'

It was a saying of a great German philosopher\* that there were two things which impressed him with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence—the starry heavens above, and the law of conscience within.

Something of the same spirit must have filled the Psalmist when he wrote this nineteenth Psalm, in which he celebrates God's manifestation of Himself in nature and in His revealed law.

1. It has been often noticed that the psalm consists of two distinct parts—so distinct that some have held that their union was an after-thought, and that they must originally have belonged to different hymns. The supposition is scarcely necessary, for surely the transition is not an unnatural or a violent one—from the thought of GOD in nature to that of GOD in revelation.

\* Kant. Cf. Kirkpatrick *On the Psalms* (Cambridge Bible), p. 101.

And very instructive is it to note how the Psalmist suggests a contrast between the two by the different names for GOD which he employs in the two parts of the psalm. The Hebrew tongue has many names for GOD, but there are two principal ones, and it is often interesting to see which is employed. There is first the ordinary name for GOD, 'Elohim,' or 'El,'\* a name which simply speaks of the Supreme Being, the Maker and Creator of all things visible and invisible, but tells us nothing of His nature and character. But there is also the name by which GOD specially revealed Himself as entering into covenant with man, which spoke of His personal relations to His own people, His manifestation to them, and His unchanging love for them. This is what we might reverently call the 'proper name' of GOD. It is sometimes represented in our Bibles as Jehovah, more often simply as the LORD, the translators having followed Jewish custom, which shrank, from motives of reverence, from pronouncing the word because of its sacredness, and ordinarily substituted for it another word meaning LORD. Now let us turn to the psalm before us, and what do we find there?

In the first part, consisting of verses 1 to 6, of which the subject is Nature, we are told that the heavens declare the glory of GOD. It is GOD, El, the strong, the mighty, whom the world around reveals. Of GOD as Power you can learn from Nature. Would you know Him as Love, as

\* The words are really distinct, but for practical purposes they may be treated as identical in meaning.



entering into personal relations with man—for this, the Psalmist seems to say, you must go to Revelation. And therefore, in the second part of the psalm, from verse 7 onwards, where he describes the glory of the revealed law, the name of Him who gives it is changed. He no longer speaks of Him simply as GOD. It is the law of the LORD that is perfect. The LORD—that is, Jehovah, the covenant name under which the Almighty revealed Himself to Moses at the bush, the name which spoke to every Jew of One who had set His love upon man, who was mindful of him, and entered into closest personal relations with him.

And that the thought of the covenant between GOD and man was present to the mind of the Psalmist when, in singing the praise of GOD's law, he uses this name Jehovah, is indicated by the significant fact that he introduces this most sacred name exactly seven times in the course of the Psalm. *Seven times*—that is the covenant number, which to the Jew at once suggested the union of heaven and earth, the covenant between God and man.

2. The thoughts of the psalm are as fresh to-day as on the day when the Psalmist first gave utterance to them. There have been, of course, those who have fancied that the discoveries of modern science have done away with the testimony of Nature to GOD, and who would therefore bid us rewrite the psalm, so as to make it begin with the announcement 'The heavens declare the glory of Kepler'; but somehow the old arguments



from Nature, even if they require readjusting from time to time, live on, and appeal as strongly as ever to thoughtful minds, and are, as it has been truly said, 'if not resistless, yet sufficient, and if not compelling, yet convincing.'

There are many who will remember that fine passage in the *Confessions* of Augustine in which, describing his search after GOD, he tells us how all Nature witnessed to one above as its Creator.

'I asked the earth, and it answered me, "I am not He"; and all the things that are in it confessed the same. I asked the sea and the depths, and the moving creatures, and they answered, "We are not thy GOD; seek above us." I asked the air, and the whole air, with the inhabitants thereof, answered, "Anaximenes was wrong; I am not thy GOD." I asked the heavens, sun, moon, and stars. "Nor," say they, "are we the GOD whom thou seekest." And I replied unto all the things around, "Ye have told me of my GOD, that ye are not He: tell me something of Him." And they cried out with a loud voice, "He made us." '\*

Ask the question of the heavens to-day, and the answer returned is still the same: 'The heavens declare the glory of GOD, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.' Listen to the voice of the sun, moon, and stars, and still shall you hear them

'For ever singing as they shine,  
The Hand that made us is Divine.'

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\* Augustine's *Confessions*, x. 9.

And if the sight of the universe around us suggests the thought of a Being of infinite power, to whom it owes its existence, as we look a little closer, and see in ourselves and in everything on all sides of us ten thousand instances of design and adaptation, we feel that not only power but wisdom also has been at work. We re-echo the question of another psalmist: 'He that made the eye, shall He not see? or He that planteth the ear, shall He not hear?'

But we want something more than power and wisdom if the great Being whom we worship is to answer our idea of perfection. And if we interrogate Nature further, and ask, 'What of the goodness and love of God?' what answer is returned to us? It is true, on the one hand, that there are many things to suggest that He who ordered the world in its wondrous harmony of form and colour and beauty is Himself goodness and love.

'Yes,' said a great French statesman once, 'God is not only great and powerful: He is good. Look, sir'—and he turned to an engraving upon the wall—'see how beautiful this engraving is. Yet it wants one thing—it wants colour. God might have made the world an engraving: He has made it a painting. Yes, God is good, and I love Him.'

There are moods in which the beauty of the world will irresistibly suggest this thought to us. We gaze in silence on some fair landscape. And when the heart swells and the eye fills with tears, as we drink in the full beauty of the scene before

us, to which, perhaps, lake and forest and snow-clad mountain all contribute something, then, say, is it not a sense of the goodness as well as the greatness of GOD which steals in upon us, and makes us not only stand awed and humbled at the majesty and glory revealed, but also lifts the heart heavenward in glad thanksgiving to Him who has created such wondrous beauty? But, on the other hand, there are moods in which we cannot deny that there is much in Nature to baffle and perplex us. We fix our minds on another set of facts—the ceaseless warfare, the apparent waste, the pain and seeming cruelty all about us in the natural world—and at once ‘we falter where we firmly trod.’ We have all heard of J. S. Mill’s terrible indictment against Nature: ‘Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are Nature’s everyday performances.’\* Unfair, overstrained, and exaggerated it will be admitted to be; but yet there have been times in the lives of many who ‘trusted GOD was love indeed, and love creation’s final law,’ when, with the fullest wish to believe, they have yet felt as if

‘Nature, red in tooth and claw  
With ravine, shrieked against their creed.’†

And if there was nothing beyond the revelation of GOD as made in Nature, it is possible that we should only be able to speak with stammering lips and hesitating utterances. So, I have been

\* *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 28.

† Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, lvi.

told, was the thought borne in upon the mind of an eminent man of science not long ago. Given a God, he said—and he thought that all nature pointed to the existence of one—then He *must* reveal Himself. In other words, if God be indeed Goodness and Love, as well as Power and Wisdom, then He must speak and assure us of it Himself.

And assured us He has; for ‘God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by His SON.’\* And ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten SON, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’†

In the light of the Incarnation the latter half of this nineteenth Psalm gains a new force and meaning. We can fitly sing it as we do in the course of the Psalms, or as we take it as a proper psalm for Christmas day, with hearts full of the thought of the revelation of God’s love manifested in the manger at Bethlehem, and all that it means to us.

‘The law of Jehovah is perfect : restoring the soul.  
The testimony of Jehovah is sure : making wise the simple.  
The statutes of Jehovah are right : rejoicing the heart.  
The commandment of Jehovah is pure : enlightening the eyes.  
The fear of Jehovah is clean : enduring for ever.  
The judgments of Jehovah are true : and righteous altogether.

\*                      \*                      \*                      \*

O Jehovah ! my strength and my Redeemer !’

3. But if the glory of the heaven and earth,

\* Heb. i. 1.

† John iii. 16.

and the revelation of God's love in the Incarnation, are thus to make their appeal to us, we must ever remember that something is needed on our part. The eye must be opened, or it cannot see the beauties of nature so lavishly scattered all around; the ear must be unstopped, or it cannot hear the Divine harmonies of celestial music which fill the air.

If you will, you can close the eyes and stop the ears, so that *to you* the heavens display no glory of GOD, and that *to you* the law of the LORD gives no message of glad tidings. There is in the indulgence of any known and admitted sin a terrible power to darken the light of the eye, and deaden the ear to the voice of GOD. He, therefore, who would take in the revelation of GOD must in all loyal singleness of heart keep clear of all such. But more than this is needed. There are many things which are not wrong in themselves, but which, nevertheless, have a bad effect on some people, and therefore become sin *to them*, though perfectly innocent in themselves. And as in the call to sacrifice these there lies perhaps the hardest trial of all, so in the response to it there will be found the surest test of the purity and singleness of our aim. Let me give an illustration which will convey my meaning better than any elaborate explanation of my own. One of the most gifted singers that the world has known, who for her power of song was known as the 'Swedish nightingale,' was seated one evening towards sunset on the seashore with an open book on her knee. Her talk with the friend who

sat beside her turned on her early days and triumphant scenes, when every capital of Europe rang with her fame. 'Oh, Madame Goldschmidt,' said the friend, 'how was it that you ever came to abandon the stage at the very height of your success?' 'When, every day,' was the quiet answer, 'it made me think less of *this*,' laying her finger upon the open Bible, 'and nothing at all of that,' pointing to the sunset, 'what else *could I do*?' Jenny Lind was no Puritan, with a Puritan's horror and detestation of the stage. She never condemned it, but she felt that, whatever it might be for others, yet for her there were dangers to the spiritual life in the brilliant career that had opened out before her. At any cost she was determined that to her the heavens should still declare the glory of God, and that she would still keep the knowledge that the law of Jehovah is perfect. She would sacrifice everything that came between her and this, and therefore her determination was fixed, and she put aside at once all the crowns and triumphs and homage which were hers, not ceasing to use the gift which God Himself had given her, but only consecrating it to a higher use, and dedicating it to a nobler service.

It is not likely that any one of us is called upon to make the decision in a manner that strikes the imagination so forcibly as this. But in a humbler fashion, and on a smaller scale, it is possible that there are some things in the life of many of us of which it must be confessed that they tend to make us think every day less of the

Word of GOD, and nothing at all of the witness which Nature bears to Him. And if by the grace of GOD we can determine that from henceforth, be they what they may, they shall come between us and Him no more, we shall find that somehow the eye becomes more quick to see, and the ear more ready to hear, and the heart more willing to acknowledge those tokens of His presence, which GOD makes known to all who love Him and serve Him with sincerity of heart, for there is a 'secret of the Lord' which 'is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.'



## XIV

### Confession

Ps. xxxii. 6 : 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the LORD ; and so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin.'

IF there is one thing which is clear from Holy Scripture in regard to the forgiveness of sin, it is the necessity of confession of it. We see it alike in the Old and in the New Testament : before the Law, under the Law, in the Gospels, and in the Epistles. 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper ; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.'\* In these words of the Hebrew sage we may sum up the teaching of the Old Testament. In these of St. John, the teaching of the New : 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'† 'If we confess our sins'—there it is : where the condition is unsatisfied we have no right to expect the blessing.

Why this condition has been required by GOD for His pardon it is not difficult to see. Look at it first simply from the point of view of the penitent himself.

\* Prov. xxviii. 13.

† 1 John i. 9.

Confession is the natural relief of the overburdened soul. It satisfies a real want in man's moral nature. There must be many a one who has known at some time or other what it is to have something really weighing on the mind : some miserable secret which you have carried about for days, perhaps for months, unknown to any other. How it has weighed you down, and haunted you ! It is the real cause of that depression of spirits which others have perhaps taxed you with. You cannot get rid of it from your thoughts. There it is the last thing at night, and when you wake in the morning, even before you have collected your thoughts, you have a dim and confused sense of something oppressing you, and back it all comes again as the mind clears to full consciousness. In the daytime you do your best to drive it away by talk and employment, but there it is all the while. But—just tell this miserable secret to another, some friend whose judgment and discretion you can rely on ; and lo ! a load seems lifted off the mind at once. *Liberavi animam meam.* The feeling of relief is immediate and intense. Life, which seemed almost unbearable yesterday, is worth living again to-day, Judge Hughes' story of Tom Brown at Oxford is not perhaps so much read now as it was thirty years ago. But there is a powerful scene in it which bears on this point and deserves to be remembered. The hero, who has foolishly set his hand to a bill, and is carrying about the wretched secret that he is liable for some hundred pounds which he cannot pay, goes into the University church, and

hears a sermon urging this very duty. 'Is there, asks the preacher'—and a footnote tells us that it is a quotation from a sermon actually preached by Dean Stanley—'is there anyone who has ever felt, who is at this moment feeling, this grievous burden? What is the deliverance? How shall he set himself free? There is at least one way, clear and simple. He knows it better than anyone can tell him. It is to tell the truth. . . . One word of open, frank disclosure, one resolution to act sincerely and honestly by himself and others, one ray of truth let into that dark corner, will indeed set the whole man free. *Liberavi animam meam.* I have delivered my soul. What a faithful expression is this of the relief, the deliverance, effected by one strong effort of will in one moment of time.' 'I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned.' And so after the sermon the hero of the tale comes out from the shadow of the church, and then and there blurts out to the trusty friend accompanying him his confession, and in the telling it finds the relief for which his soul has been craving. So is it often in real life. And if it is so, we can surely understand how GOD in His infinite wisdom takes this natural instinct, and finds a place for it in the system of His Church, and requires the confession of sin to precede the Divine assurance of pardon, making it an integral part of that repentance, which not only wins the forgiveness of the sin, but also delivers the sinner from the burden of the sin itself. Depend upon it, if we don't understand the moral necessity of confessing our

sins in order to be released from them, it is because we have no real sense of sin, because there is nothing in us which truly merits the name of contrition. Let the burden be felt, and the desire to be rid of it by confessing the sin will be felt too.

Next, let us look at the matter not only from the point of view of the penitent wrongdoer, but from the side of him who has been wronged. Here, again, you know for yourselves that where a man has offended against you it makes all the difference to you if he acknowledges his sin. So long as the acknowledgment is withheld and there is no expression of regret, you say that you cannot be expected to forgive. Let there be a frank admission of the fault and a request for forgiveness, and your better nature tells you at once that you should meet the offender half-way. Why? Because the confession is in itself at once the outcome and the proof of the changed attitude of the wrongdoer. It is the evidence that the proud or unkind feelings that held sway in his heart are reigning there no longer. They are expelled, and his confession proclaims it aloud; and you feel instinctively that now to withhold forgiveness would put you in the wrong, and make you to become the one to harbour malice and proud thoughts, and therefore it is that on the spot it meets with the forgiveness it seeks, and the reconciliation is complete. Now, if this is the case between man and man, cannot we understand from it something of the nature of the Divine forgiveness? God's pardon is not a mere letting off the consequences of sin. It is no

license to sin with impunity. Rather it is the deliverance of the sinner from the power of sin, and his restoration to the light of GOD's countenance. But if this is so, then GOD cannot pardon so long as the sinner is continuing in his hardness and impenitence. Only let the changed condition be there, of which the confession is the natural outcome and the external expression, and at once GOD's love goes forth, and meets it with the full assurance of forgiveness. There it is. 'I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord; and Thou—Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin.'

But the subject cannot be left here, for questions have arisen, and questions always will arise, as to the manner in which this confession is to be made. One thing about it is quite clear and certain: that is, it must be something very real and thorough; a mere vague acknowledgment of sinfulness is not sufficient. That is easy enough to make. As all are sinners, it costs the individual nothing to admit it in his own case. So there are multitudes who haunt our churches from indolence of habit, and smilingly confess themselves sinners, without ever remembering the tremendous purport of the words which they employ; who echo the thrilling penitence of the confession in the service in the same tone that inquires the news of the day. In all this there is nothing in common with the confession that brings relief to the sin-laden soul. Much more than this is needed. As the sins were committed one by one as definite acts, so as definite acts they should be one by one confessed to GOD. But this implies real knowledge of self,

such a knowledge as can only be secured by regular searching self-examination. Even the heathen felt that the maxim 'Know thyself' came from heaven ;\* and without this self-knowledge be sure that sins unnumbered will remain unconfessed, and therefore unrepented of, to arise hereafter to your shame and condemnation at the judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of CHRIST. All this means that repentance is a real and serious work. It implies effort on our part, a determination that by GOD's grace we will have the courage to look into the past, to face it as it is in GOD's sight ; and then honestly to speak out to Him the truth we have discovered about ourselves, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So much, perhaps, all thoughtful and earnest Churchmen will admit to be necessary. But there remains the further question whether this confession is to be made in secret to GOD alone, or whether it shall be made in the presence of GOD's minister, that the message of pardon may come through the ministry of reconciliation. Now, the question seems to me to be often needlessly complicated, because people will speak as if there were two confessions of sin, one to GOD and one to man ; whereas this is a wholly wrong way of putting it. The Church knows but one confession that precedes the Divine forgiveness, and that is confession to GOD. But the question for each is whether this confession is to be made unaided, or whether the penitent may have the help of GOD's

\* Juvenal, *Satire*, xi., l. 27.



minister, and the authoritative announcement of God's pardon. And when we put it in this way, the answer ought not to be far to seek. I do not see how anyone who knows anything of the history of the English Church, or who has honestly considered the language of the Prayer-Book, can have the shadow of a doubt that the English Church means to provide a place for this last for those who need it. Take such a book as Walton's *Lives* of Hooker, Donne, Wotton, Herbert, and Sanderson. It is a book that is absolutely free from party spirit; and the lives told in it are those of representative Churchmen of a sober type, and there you find one after another making use of the help to which they felt that they had a right.\* So in the Book of Common Prayer there are well-known passages, both in the exhortation to Holy Communion and in the Visitation of the Sick, which no ingenuity can explain away, which place very clearly before us its position in the Christian life, as the healing medicine which the soul may require. This is

\* See especially the *Life of Mr. Richard Hooker*: 'About one day before his death Dr. Saravia, who knew the very secrets of his soul—for they were supposed to be confessors to each other—came to him, and after a conference of the benefit, the necessity, and safety of the Church's absolution, it was resolved that the doctor should give him both that and the Sacrament the following day.' So also in the *Life of Dr. Robert Sanderson*: 'After his taking to his bed, and about a day before his death, he desired his chaplain, Mr. Pullin, to give him absolution; and at his performing that office, he pulled off his cap, that Mr. Pullin might lay his hand upon his bare head. After this desire of his was satisfied his body seemed to be at more ease and his mind more cheerful.'



something widely different from the rigid and compulsory system of the Church of Rome. There it is insisted on as a duty. With us it is offered as a privilege. The Church does not for one moment say that there is no real penitence, no true confession, without it. But she does say : If you need the help of it, come. She teaches what we may fairly call the liberty of confession ; and if there are those who claim this liberty on one side, and decline to use this medicine of the sick soul, holding that it is not for them, let them not take it ill if others claim this liberty on the other side, and, feeling that they require help in laying hold of God's promises, or in deepening their penitence, come, as the Prayer-Book directs them to do in such a case, to some 'discreet and learned minister of God's word and open their grief, that by the ministry of God's Holy Word they may receive the benefit of Absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice.' In either case the confession is made to God : from Him alone the forgiveness can come. But, as we are reminded every day in our daily office, He has given 'power' as well as 'commandment' to His ministers 'to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins,' and if He has been pleased to appoint a 'ministry of reconciliation' it cannot be wrong for men to resort to it. It is for each one to face the question for himself, and say whether this discipline is for him. To his own Master he standeth or falleth. But we to whom God has committed this ministry would be untrue to our

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Divine commission were we not ready to offer this means of grace to all who desire it. There are many who have found it hard to scramble up through their difficulties unaided, and who would have been thankful for help had they known where to turn for it. There are many whose sins are 'like a sore burden, too heavy for them to bear.' For all such God has provided an express comfort and a remedy ; and not only may no man deny it to them, but the ministers of the Church would be unfaithful did they not make known its existence, and proclaim their willingness to do their part in applying it.

## XV

### The Destruction of Sennacherib's Host

Ps. xlv. 11 : 'The LORD of hosts is with us : the GOD of Jacob is our refuge.'

AN interest is always added to a psalm if we can assign its composition to some definite historical occasion, picturing to ourselves the circumstances under which it was written, and calling up before the imagination the incidents to which it refers. It is, of course, not necessary to be able to do this. The devotional use of the Psalter is wholly independent of it, and oftentimes the language of the psalms is such that they are appropriate to many different circumstances and occasions. Indeed, it is in this fact that their peculiar value lies. We can take these old Hebrew psalms, written so many years ago, under circumstances which are lost in the mist of a dim antiquity, and we can make them fit our own case to-day and turn them into the expression of our wants, desires, hopes, aspirations, fears, and regrets. No fitter language can be found than that which they contain to express our personal or national thanksgivings for mercies received, our longing for blessings to be

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granted, our confessions of sins committed. We need not ask for what occasion they were composed in order to use them thus. But still, whenever we can assign a definite occasion to any psalm we feel that a great interest is added to it, and we can read it with a deeper appreciation of its beauties.

Now, the three psalms numbered xlv., xlvii. and xlviii. form a closely-connected group, in which the language of thanksgiving for deliverance from some calamity is so pointed and definite that we can have no hesitation in saying that they must have been composed as hymns of praise for some special national mercy, and deliverance from some special and imminent danger. And there is one occasion described in the Book of Kings to which this language is so extraordinarily appropriate that they may be assigned to it with a probability which approaches certainty. The occasion is the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the army of Sennacherib in the reign of Hezekiah. The story is familiar to every child. There is no need to repeat it at length. Everybody will recollect how Sennacherib came up to chastise his rebellious vassal, and how, while besieging Lachish with the main body of his army, he sent a force under the command of his chief officers, the Tartan and Rabсарis and Rabshakeh, to demand the surrender of Jerusalem. Twice the demand was made in insulting language, with threats of summary vengeance should it be refused. The second time Hezekiah took the taunting letter to the Temple and spread it before the LORD, appealing

to Him in his hour of extremity to confute the blasphemies of the Assyrian, and to vindicate His claims to be the living GOD. Then it was that Isaiah uttered that sublime prophecy in which he declared that Sennacherib's pride was doomed to be humbled, and that Jerusalem would be preserved inviolate. And so it came to pass, for 'that night the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand : and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.'\*

Byron's fine lines set the whole scene before us with a vividness that can scarcely be surpassed :

'The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold ;  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,  
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

'Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen ;  
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,  
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

'For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed ;  
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still.

'And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,  
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride ;  
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,  
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

‘And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,  
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail ;  
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,  
The lances uplifted, the trumpet unblown.

‘And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,  
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal ;  
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,  
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the LORD.’\*

How that great host was actually destroyed must be to some extent a matter of conjecture. The sacred historian contents himself with saying that ‘the angel of the LORD went forth and smote them’; but, as the sound good sense of old Samuel Johnson saw, this assertion was never intended to deny the existence of secondary causes, and what we call natural means. ‘We are not to suppose,’ said the Doctor, ‘that the angel went about with a sword in his hand, stabbing the Assyrians as they lay sleeping in their tents.’ It is probable enough that a pestilence, which has often been fatal to other armies in just the very spot where the Assyrian was encamped, was the actual instrument of destruction;† but whatever it was, Israel was perfectly right in tracing it directly to the hand of the LORD, and so signal a manifestation of Jehovah’s power could not but strike them with awe. Theirs was no vulgar triumph over their foes; and in the midst of their national rejoicing there was mingled a note of awe, which these psalms, with all their thankfulness, accurately reflect.

\* *Hebrew Melodies.*

† See a striking passage to this effect in G. A. Smith’s *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 158.

'GOD is our hope and strength,' so they sang at the time, 'a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved : and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof rage and swell : and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same. The rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of GOD : the holy place of the tabernacle of the most Highest. GOD is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed : GOD shall help her, and that right early. The heathen make much ado, and the kingdoms are moved : but GOD hath showed His voice, and the earth shall melt away. The LORD of hosts is with us : the GOD of Jacob is our refuge. O come hither, and behold the works of the LORD : what destruction He hath wrought upon the earth. He maketh wars to cease in all the world : He breaketh the bow, and knappeth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire. Be still, then, and know that I am GOD : I will be exalted among the heathen ; and I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us : the GOD of Jacob is our refuge.'

History offers but few parallels to this deliverance, so sudden, so complete, so contrary to human expectation. Perhaps that which comes nearest to it is the deliverance of our own country from the Spanish Armada. There was the same disproportion of forces, the eighty little vessels of the English fleet being matched against the 132 gigantic galleons, galleasses, and merchantmen of the Spaniards. There was the same arrogance



and boasting on the side of the invader when that huge Armada set sail from the harbours of Spain. There was the same sudden, complete, and unexpected destruction, traced, as was this other, by those who witnessed it, to the hand of God Himself. Read the historian's account of the way in which that mighty force sailed proudly on in a broad crescent past Plymouth, and so up the Channel, with the gallant little English vessels hanging on its rear, but powerless to stop it. True that Drake and his men were able to do serious damage, but the historian confesses that 'the work of destruction was reserved for a mightier foe than Drake,' for the storms of the Northern seas suddenly broke upon them in their fury, and the huge ships were driven helplessly before them, shattered, dispersed, and broken. 'I sent my ships against men,' said Philip of Spain when the news reached him, 'not against the seas.' It was in a nobler tone, and one worthy of the old Hebrew Psalmist, that England owned the debt to the storm which drove the Armada to its doom. On the medal that commemorated the triumph were graven the words, 'The LORD sent His wind, and scattered them.' The pride of the conquerors was hushed before their sense of a mighty deliverance.\*

Such psalms as this on which we have been dwelling show us how the Jews loved to think on their national history, and how full of lessons of

\* See J. R. Green's *History of the English People*, vol. ii., p. 446.

hope and trust it was for them. The Church of JESUS CHRIST has a history no less full of thrilling incidents and signal manifestations of God's power. The study of it, as Bishop Lightfoot always maintained, is 'the best cordial for a drooping spirit.' It will lead you to take a hopeful view of the future. There is, indeed, a shallow optimism that anticipates no evil and imagines that no disaster can befall us, a sort of unreasoned conviction that things will 'muddle out right in the end'—an optimism that is akin to the sanguine temperament which is always sure that something or other will turn up, which is caught by the prospectuses of speculators, and is invariably certain that it has got hold of a good thing. Such an optimism is simply mischievous, and has been the ruin of many an honest man. But there is also an optimism that is far deeper and nobler, that springs from no light-hearted gaiety, and is not the result of a mere sanguine temperament or even of a good digestion. It is an optimism that has its roots in knowledge of the past and experience, and is based on a profound trust in God, who has never forsaken the Church which the Saviour founded, and against which He has promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail. For well-nigh two thousand years the Church has trusted in Him, and she has never found her trust misplaced. 'The LORD of hosts is with us : the GOD of Jacob is our refuge.' It is that thought that gives us confidence and hopefulness in the outlook. Let us take it as our support in times of trial, our

assurance in days of anxiety. It will help us to gain that spirit of quiet dependence upon God which has been the salvation of the Church so many times in the long course of her chequered history, and which will be her stay and support till the end.

## XVI

### Meditation

Ps. xlviii. 8 : ' We wait for Thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of Thy temple.'

THE waiting attitude is not a popular one now. We are all for immediate action, and desirous to be always doing something—it doesn't much matter what. I often feel that the words of the Psalmist and the attitude of the Apostles between the Ascension and the day of Pentecost have a message for us which perhaps was not needed in the same way in previous periods of the Church's history. There were times once when those whose hearts God had touched were in danger of sacrificing action to contemplation—when they were ready to 'bid for cloistered cell their neighbour and their work farewell.' In the third and fourth centuries, for instance, there suddenly sprang up in the deserts of Egypt and among the islands of the Nile a vast colony of Christian monks and hermits. Men who had reached lofty positions in the State, who were high in the counsels of the Emperor, or had commanded his armies in the field, as they came to realise the

needs of their own spiritual life, felt as if the first thing to be done was to flee from the wrath to come, and disentangle themselves from the cares and pleasures of this world; and so, abandoning their earthly callings, they fled to the deserts, and there passed their days in a round of prayer and meditation, broken only by the practice of austerities and the preparation of the meagre and scanty fare which the desert provided. We need not sneer at them, or condemn their lives as useless. They taught the world many a much-needed lesson, and gave an example of self-control to men who were providing for themselves by grasping avarice, by hasty, passionate violence, and by giving free rein to their passions. Theirs was perhaps the highest life of which that age was capable, but as we look back on it we can see that it was a one-sided life. It has been said that 'its essence was a selfish unselfishness. It aimed at sacrificing the excitement and vain glory of the struggles and triumphs of the present, or at escaping from the depressing defeats and miseries of life, in order to gain eternal peace in the world to come, with some firstfruits of quiet and rest in the world which was. Yet, self-centred as were the thoughts of the monk, his self-seeking was of an incomparably higher order than that of the world around.'\*

And so we need not speak slightly of it, although we admit that the ideal which it offered was not the highest, and that it exaggerated one part of man's duty at the expense of another,

\* S. R. Gardiner's *Introduction to English History*, p. 23.

which is really not less important. There is, however, not much risk of our falling into the same exaggeration to-day. With us the danger lies in the opposite direction. The monk may have sacrificed action to contemplation; many of us most certainly are too ready to sacrifice contemplation to action. We are never happy unless we are busy *doing* something. To 'wait for God's loving-kindness in the midst of His temple' sounds like a counsel of perfection, and something beyond our powers. It would be all very well if life were longer, if it wasn't such a rush and hurry. But, as things are, it seems like waste of time and indolence. We have got into such a way of rushing through life that we can't sit still:

' We see all sights from pole to pole,  
And glance, and nod, and bustle by,  
And never once possess our soul  
Before we die.'\*

The week is taken up from Monday morning till Saturday with business, politics, society, interests of one kind or another, which leave but scanty leisure for serious thought on religion and the things of God, and a change of habit and feeling has gradually crept over us with regard to the Sunday. It is turned by one half of the community into a day of pleasure. There are constant 'week-ends' in the country or at the seaside, and so the other half of the community is kept hard at work on the Sunday to minister to

\* Matthew Arnold, *A Southern Night*.

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the pleasures of their more fortunate neighbours. All this is robbing many persons of just the one quiet day in the week which their forefathers were accustomed to dedicate to thought and prayer and self-examination, and the loss to our personal religion who shall dare to estimate? It is very striking sometimes, in reading older biographies, to notice how much time busy and active men used formerly to succeed in securing for such communion with God, and one cannot but wish that more persons would make an effort to secure it to-day. Take such a book as Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. How constant are the references in it to Johnson's meditations and prayers! How striking is the account given of the rules which he drew up for his religious life and observance of Sundays, when he was to 'examine the term of his life, and particularly the last week, and to mark his advances in religion or recession from it, and also to wear off by meditation any worldly soil contracted in the week!' How impressive is the notice of that Good Friday which Boswell passed with him, when Johnson spent the time between the two church services in quietly studying the Greek Testament!

Or take another life, belonging not so much to the eighteenth century, but to the first half of the last. Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton was a busy man with his hands full, if ever there was one—a man with a large and constantly-developing business to manage, a member of Parliament with the keenest interest in the social questions of the day. He was the man on whom William Wilber-



force's mantle fell when that veteran philanthropist was forced by age and infirmities to give up the leadership of the party that was agitating for the suppression of slavery ; and in addition to all this Buxton was a keen sportsman, passionately devoted to field sports, to his horses, his dogs, and his guns. Yet as you read the life of this man you cannot fail to have your attention arrested by the way in which, in the midst of his busy life and multifarious duties and interests to be attended to, he insisted on making time for quiet thought, not only keeping his Sundays free from business thoughts and cares, but, in addition to this, snatching a hardly-earned day here and there, when he would escape from the world, and spend hours alone in meditation and review of the past, and communings of his spirit with his GOD. It is something of this kind that we need, almost more than anything else, in the religious life of to-day. We cannot do without time for thought, review, consideration, and the words of the Psalmist, which I have read to you as my text, may well remind us of what is wanted. 'We wait for Thy loving-kindness, O GOD, in the midst of Thy temple.'

When St. Bernard's old pupil, Eugenius, was raised to the Papacy, the saint was asked to write him a letter of advice as to his life in the exalted position in which he found himself, and St. Bernard, after describing in forcible terms the deadening and hardening effect of the rush and hurry of life necessitated by the mass of secular cares and business into which the chief pastor of the Church

would be plunged, gives him as his main counsel this simple piece of advice: Vacari consideration—Get time to think.\* Charles Darwin was a very different man from St. Bernard, but his counsel to his disciple, John George Romanes, is identical: 'Cultivate the habit of meditation.' The saint of the twelfth century and the scientific teacher of the nineteenth are at one in their counsel to their followers, and it is a counsel which none of us would be the worse for following. 'We wait for Thy loving-kindness, O GOD, in the midst of Thy temple.' However busy your life may be, 'get time to think.' 'Cultivate the habit of meditation,' and wait upon the LORD your GOD.

\* St. Bernard, *De Consideratione*, book i., c. vii.

## XVII

### The Imprecatory Psalms

Ps. lviii. 8 : 'Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns : so let indignation vex him, even as a thing that is raw' (P.-B. V.).

THE Prayer-Book version of the psalms must ever be dear to Churchmen. It is not only that it is associated with our childhood and bound up with our earliest recollections, although, indeed, the fact that it is through it that most of us made our first acquaintance with the Psalms of David, and that we have been familiar with its cadences as far back as memory carries us, can hardly fail to make us love it ; but, besides this, the intrinsic merits of the version are so great that it is not likely that it will ever be rudely discarded. It comes originally, as a note in the prefatory matter at the beginning of our Prayer-Book tells us, from 'the translation of the great English Bible, set forth and used in the time of Henry VIII. and Edward VI.' This is what is commonly known as Cranmer's Bible, though the man to whom it is really mainly due was Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter. His hand is apparent throughout ; and to his exquisite taste

and faultless ear we owe the marvellous melody and rhythm of the Prayer-Book version as compared with the later translation of the seventeenth century found in our Bibles, or the still more recent version with which the exact scholarship of the nineteenth century has furnished us. We cannot wonder that when at the last revision of the Prayer-Book in 1662 the daily lessons, together with the Epistles and Gospels, were ordered to be taken from the then recent version of King James's reign a special exception was made in favour of the Psalter, because the choirs and congregations had grown familiar with the older translation, which was felt to be smoother and more easy to sing. Smoother and more easy to sing it certainly is. 'Its style'—so it has recently been said by one who has made a special study of it—'is bold and vigorous, and at the same time singularly flowing and melodious; its phraseology, while thoroughly idiomatic and of genuinely native growth, is dignified and chaste. Coverdale, it is evident, must have been a natural master of English style, and must have possessed a natural aptitude for finding felicitous forms of expression, and for casting them into harmonious and finely-rolling periods.'\* And yet, admire it as we well may, we cannot deny that as a translation it is not free from serious defects. Not only did Coverdale allow himself considerable freedom in dealing with the shape of the original sentences, but sometimes, it must be confessed, he has given us

\* S. R. Driver, *The Parallel Psalter*, p. xxiv.

renderings out of which it is difficult to extract any meaning whatever.

‘Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove : that is covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold. When the Almighty scattered kings for their sake : then were they as white as snow in Salmon.’

How many persons out of an ordinary congregation can attach any definite idea to these verses of Psalm lxviii., or who has any conception of the meaning of Psalm lxxxvii.? ‘I will think upon Rahab and Babylon: with them that know me. Behold ye the Philistines also: and they of Tyre, with the Morians; lo, there was he born. . . . The singers also and trumpeters shall he rehearse: all my fresh springs shall be in thee.’ So with the passage before us which is sung in the ordinary course of the psalms on the eleventh morning of the month. There must be many who from their childhood have been puzzled and bewildered when called upon to join in repeating the words: ‘Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns: so let indignation vex him, even as a thing that is raw.’ What in the world do they signify? In this particular case we most certainly need not think hardly of Coverdale because his translation fails to convey much meaning to us, for I doubt if the revisers of 1884 have been much more successful in framing a rendering that shall be intelligible. ‘Before your pots can feel the thorns He shall take them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike.’ Further, it must be noted that by presenting us with an alternative in

the margin they have indicated that considerable doubt hangs over the real translation of the words: 'Before your pots can feel the thorns, even as raw flesh, even so shall fury sweep them away.' The verse, then, is in any case a difficult one, and the reader of the Prayer-Book version is not the only person who requires the aid of the expositor if he is to attach any meaning to it. However, though the precise sense of the words in the second half of the verse may be uncertain, there is no real doubt as to the general aim and significance of the verse as a whole, and a short explanation may perhaps make it clear to all. It comes immediately after some of those fierce imprecations of evil upon the Psalmist's foes, with which we are from time to time startled in these ancient hymns. In the previous verses David, or whoever may have been the author of the psalm, has compared his persecutors to wild beasts, and has called upon God to break their teeth, and so to render them powerless. He has asked that they may fail as the torrent in the desert, swollen by the winter's snows and rains, but dwindling down to a tiny stream, and then failing altogether in the heat of summer. He has prayed that they may become as the slime in the empty shell, when the snail has been shrivelled and wasted away during a long-continued drought. And then, once more changing the figure, he imagines them as a party of travellers in the desert gathered together towards evening for refreshment. The chase is ended, the quarry is struck down, and the hungry travellers have assembled round the fire to roast it for their

supper. We are to suppose that the thorns, which furnish the only fuel forthcoming in the desert, have been hastily gathered together into a pile; the pot is slung over them with the raw meat inside. A light is put to the sticks. The fire blazes up, and the hunters are reckoning on presently satisfying their hunger. 'But,' cries the Psalmist, 'or ever your pots can feel the thorns,' before the fire has properly heated them, or the meat begun to be cooked, GOD shall send the storm wind down upon you. In an instant the fuel so laboriously gathered together, the green sticks and the burning alike, shall be swept away with a whirlwind. What a picture of disappointed expectation it is! The chase over, the men gathered round the fire in eager anticipation of the coming supper, the fire blazing up, and then in an instant the men half-blinded by the sandstorm, and flesh, fuel, and pots scattered to the winds! So, cries the Psalmist, does GOD deal with those who work wickedness, who weigh out the violence of their hands. It is then you see David's way of describing the law of retribution, and GOD's interposition in judgment upon the schemes of the ungodly. For a time all seems to prosper with them: their plans are successful. Everything seems ripening to a satisfactory conclusion. They are on the verge of reaping the results of their labours; but just then, just when their exertions are at an end and they are about to taste the fruits of them, GOD interposes with His vengeance, and the cup is dashed from their lips. 'So that men shall say, Verily there is a reward



for the righteous: doubtless there is a GOD that judgeth the earth.'

If this were all, the explanation given of the Psalmist's words would remove all difficulty from the verse. It would become but the statement in a vigorous and dramatic form of the law of GOD's dealings with men, which poets and moralists and preachers have enforced in every age. The young lion with its tusks broken; the swollen torrent hurrying away and disappearing; the arrow, ready to be launched, snapped in two; the snail that had fortified itself against the summer overtaken by the hot rays; the fruit of the womb, after long and anxious hopes, cast forth lifeless; and, lastly, the whirlwind sweeping away the banqueter's food. What a series of illustrations these are of destruction—sudden and unexpected—overtaking sinners at the last! What instances is history ever furnishing of the truth of the Psalmist's words, and of the action of GOD's law of retribution! The mills of GOD grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small. 'Yes, Robespierre, there is a GOD!' cried one, when he saw 'the sea-green incorruptible' of the Reign of Terror, who only the day before had seemed to be all-powerful, himself carried off to the guillotine, to which he had condemned so many. If this were all, I say, the whole difficulty of the verse would be removed when once the figure underlying it was understood. But we cannot help feeling that this is not all. It is no mere abstract statement of a law that the Psalmist enunciates. The passage throbs with emotion,

and in verse after verse the writer wishes that these evils may fall upon his enemies. You cannot water down his words so that they shall become mere prophecies of what will happen. He is consumed with the thirst for vengeance, and heaps these maledictions upon the head of his foes. And the thought arises at once in our minds that though such feelings may have been natural and appropriate enough under the Old Dispensation, and that though we can understand their finding utterance on the lips even of an inspired man before the higher revelation of the New Testament was given, yet they are out of place in the mouth of the followers of Him who said to His disciples, 'Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you.'\* The difficulty is a real one, and is felt by many. And yet I cannot help thinking that the Church is right to sing the Psalter through as a whole, and not to attempt to expurgate it for Christian worship. Verses such as these, which contain the imprecations which were natural once in a fierce and revengeful age, may still serve as a reminder of a truth which we are often in danger of forgetting. I grant you that such sentiments as those to which the Psalmist gives utterance are not the sentiments of Christian men and women, and that we have no right literally to make the wishes contained in them our own; but there was something which the Psalmist was feeling after

\* Matt. v. 44.

which we ought to be able to enter into. The Christian poet bids us

‘Marvel not if such as bask  
In purest light of innocence,  
Hope against hope in love’s dear task,  
Spite of all dark offence;  
If they who hate the trespass most,  
Yet, when all other love is lost,  
Love the poor sinner, marvel not;  
Christ’s mark outwears the rankest blot.’\*

That is a noble ideal—to hate the trespass, but to love the sinner. But we know how difficult it is to combine the two things. If we hate the trespass, we are indignant with the sinner. If we love the sinner, we are pretty sure to think lightly of the sin. Under the Old Covenant men were good haters. ‘O ye that love the LORD, see that ye hate the thing which is evil,’ cried the Psalmist;† and men did learn to hate sin. They were consumed with a zeal for righteousness, and a horror and detestation of evil. But can we wonder that they confused together and banned with an indiscriminate curse the sin and the sinner, and that the imprecation which should have been reserved for the sin was invoked on the head of the sinner? It was the fault of a strong, stern age—yes, if you will, of a vindictive age. With us the tendency is very different. CHRIST has taught us a nobler law, and has bidden us distinguish. Those who have caught most of His Spirit are the men ‘who

\* Keble, *The Christian Year*, Fifth Sunday after Trinity.

† Ps. xcvi. 10.

hate the trespass most,' and yet, 'when all other love is lost,' still 'love the poor sinner.' But with most of us, are we really faithful to His law? We are ready to be tender to the sinner, but are we not in danger of losing sight altogether of that righteous hatred of sin, which is as necessary under the Gospel as under the law. The sense of sin as sin, and the horror of it which marked the saints of GOD, which inspired those words of the incarnate SON of GOD which seem to us so stern, which makes the New Testament, with all its love and pity, a severe book—this sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin seems to be almost dying out among men. We gloss over wrongdoing. A man is called 'unlucky' if he is found out. He 'gets into trouble' when he does a dishonest act, and cheats his employer. A girl is 'unfortunate' if the consequences of her sin overtake her. Why is it that we shrink from calling things by their right names? It is because the sin itself is thought but little of. We look at it from the world's point of view, and regard it simply as it affects men in their temporal relations. Let us be charitable to the sinner; but do not let us in our tenderness to him so water down our language, and with our language our thoughts about sin, as to destroy altogether our sense of its sinfulness. Depend upon it, if we do, we shall find that our own spiritual life will suffer. We shall think less of sin in ourselves, and our resistance against temptation will become weak and feeble. Oh, believe me, one of the greatest religious needs of the present day is a revival of the

sense of sin. 'How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against GOD?'

Unless a man realises what sin is, how hateful in the sight of GOD, and what the nature of His curse upon it is, he is powerless when overtaken by temptation; and I often feel that the recitation of these maledictions in the psalms may serve a useful purpose in reminding us that we, like the Jews, ought to be capable of being good haters. Not, like them, haters of the sinners, but, disentangling the man from the sin, haters of the sin. We cannot make their words literally our own, nor wish that these evils may overtake those who may have injured us. But as we repeat them historically, they may help us to realise that behind it all there was a real zeal for GOD's honour, and a hatred of the thing that is evil, in which we are sadly lacking. And, realising this, we may be stirred up to a zeal that is according to knowledge—a zeal for all that is good and holy and pure, which shall lead us to detest as dishonouring to GOD all that is evil, and unholy, and impure. So shall our own lives become purer in His sight and freer from sin; and as we learn to combine the Old Testament hatred of sin with the love for the sinner which the New Testament has taught us, we shall become truer followers of Him who 'did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth,' and who yet 'came into the world to save sinners.'

'When any of you,' says an old Christian preacher, 'is singing the verse of the psalms where it is said, "Let the proud be put to shame," let him be earnest to avoid pride, that he may escape

everlasting shame. When we sing, "Thou wilt destroy all them that are seduced away from Thee," let us strive to escape from all evil desire; and as often as sinners are cursed in the psalms let us endeavour to flee from sin, lest we be found to curse ourselves with our own mouth.' That is the answer returned to those who were puzzled by the difficulty so long ago as the fifth century after CHRIST, and I do not think that we need ask for a better.

## XVIII

### Rahab and Babylon

Ps. lxxxvii. 3, 4 : 'I will think upon Rahab and Babylon : with them that know me. Behold ye the Philistines also : and they of Tyre, with the Morians ; lo, there was he born ' (P.-B. V.).

THERE is perhaps no psalm in the whole Psalter so hopelessly bewildering and unintelligible to the English reader as Psalm lxxxvii. As the worshipper in our churches joins in its recitation on the seventeenth morning of the month, the wondering thought must often recur to his mind, what does it all mean ? Who was Rahab ? Who were the Morians ? Tyre we know, and Philistia we know. But who are these ? And who was born—and where ? 'Of Zion it shall be reported that he was born in her,' the next verse proceeds, and so probably a large number of persons have a dim and hazy notion that the birth of CHRIST is alluded to, although they scarcely see how to reconcile this with the fact that He was born, not in Zion, but in Bethlehem. What, then, once more, does it really mean ?

Let me try to explain it, and set before you as briefly and simply as possible the leading thought



of the psalm. And, first, a word or two about Rahab and the Morians. Rahab has, of course, nothing whatever to do with the harlot who hid the spies, as we read in the Book of Joshua. Rahab properly means 'insolence' or 'pride,' and it is used occasionally as the name of a dragon or sea monster, such as the crocodile, which is fitly taken as the emblem of the power of Egypt. In much the same way as with us the titles of 'the Russian bear' or 'the British lion' are familiarly used to represent these two great Powers of the modern world, so in this psalm, as in the Book of Isaiah, where the prophet, apostrophising the arm of the LORD, says, 'Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon,'\* it is merely a symbolical name for Egypt. The Morians are also an African people. Ethiopia the Revised Version gives: the Morians of the Prayer-Book version being nothing but the old way of writing and speaking of the Moors. We are not concerned to defend the queer geography of the sixteenth-century translators, who identified the land of the Moors with Ethiopia or Abyssinia. It is enough to know that the term was used as a popular and familiar one to denote a people of Africa. Tyre and Babylon stand for the great world Powers of Asia, and so Rahab and the Morians, or Egypt and Ethiopia, stand for the world Powers of the dark continent of Africa. And the central thought of the psalm is that a day shall come when these great empires—at the time when the psalmist wrote so hostile to GOD's

\* Isa. li. 9.

people—shall one day be enrolled as citizens of Zion, and thus admitted to a share in the blessings of the kingdom of heaven. By a singularly bold and striking figure GOD Himself is represented as taking a census of His people, registering those who are counted as His children or reckoned as born in Zion. It is each one of these, not the CHRIST, of whom it is said that ‘he was born there.’ Foreign nations, says a recent writer, are thus here described, ‘not as captives or tributaries, nor even as doing voluntary homage to the greatness and glory of Zion, but as actually incorporated and enrolled by a new birth among her sons. Even the worst enemies of the race, the tyrants and oppressors of the Jews, Egypt and Babylon, are threatened with no curse. No shout of joy is raised in the prospect of their overthrow; but the privileges of citizenship are extended to them, and they are welcomed as brothers. Nay, more: GOD Himself receives each one as a child newly-born into His family, acknowledges each as His son, and enrols him with His own hand in the sacred register of His children.’\* With this thought in your mind hear the psalm as it stands in the Revised Version, and say, is it not instinct with new meaning? May we not fitly say that it is the Old Testament expression of the truth which St. Paul declares when he tells us that ‘in CHRIST JESUS there is neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free’?† or when he writes to the Gentile Church at Ephesus, ‘Now,

\* Bishop Perowne, *On the Psalms*, vol. ii., p. 133.

† Col. iii. 11.

therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of GOD' ?\*

'His foundation is in the holy mountains.  
The LORD loveth the gates of Zion  
More than all the dwellings of Jacob.  
Glorious things are spoken of thee  
O city of GOD.'

GOD speaks :

'I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon as  
among them that know me.  
Behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia ;  
This one was born there.  
Yea, of Zion it shall be said, This one and that  
one was born in her.  
And the Most High Himself shall establish her.  
The LORD shall count, when He writeth up the  
peoples,  
This one was born there.  
They that sing as well as they that dance shall say,  
All my fountains are in thee.'

Is not the psalm fuller of meaning now than it was before ? Cannot you see that it is a magnificent prophecy of the Catholic Church ? One by one the great nations of the world pass before the eye of the Psalmist. The brow of each is wet with the waters of baptismal grace, for by a new birth of water and the Spirit 'this one and that one,' each single one of them, has entered the kingdom of heaven, and lo ! his name stands on the register of freemen : he is enrolled as a citizen of that Zion or Jerusalem which is 'the mother of us all.'

\* Eph. ii. 19.

It is a glorious vision that opened out before the eyes of the Psalmist. But it is a humiliating thought that nineteen centuries of Christianity have passed away, and the twentieth century since the birth of CHRIST has dawned, and the prophecy is still a prophecy. It has never yet received an adequate fulfilment. That it will do so one day it were the grossest want of faith to doubt; but at present we have sadly to confess that it is still only an ideal, and that the day seems yet very far distant when the great world Powers of Asia and Africa, now the strongholds of Mohammedanism, will be enrolled and admitted by a new birth into the family of GOD's covenant and adoption. Still, it is something to stir the heart, and to send the blood pulsing with quicker courses through the veins, to feel that you are taking part in the fulfilment of prophecy, and that is the aspect of missionary work which I want you to think of to-day.

It lifts it at once to a higher level, where we can see that the objections brought against foreign missions are not worth the paper on which they are written. Men may criticise our methods, and if they can show us that they are wrong we shall be grateful for the criticism, and strive to mend our ways. But to object to missions themselves is to disbelieve in the Scriptures of GOD, and to tell us to disregard altogether, as the baseless fabric of a vision, those glowing pictures of a world-wide Church which psalmist and prophet sketched, and which were before our LORD when He bade His disciples, in words that we can never

forget, to 'go and make disciples of all nations,' and pledges His word that His personal presence should be with them as they went forth in fulfilment of His command.

But what I would press upon you is this : that on no branch of the Church is the duty more clearly imposed than the Church of England. Never was a Church with such unparalleled opportunities, and never was a Church more manifestly marked out by the providence of God to be a missionary Church than our own. Look at her position and character, and you cannot fail to see this. Think of our vast colonial Empire as it exists at this moment, the growth of some three centuries. Already this gives us a position and a standing-ground in every quarter of the globe. It has taught us to 'think in continents.' British commerce and the British flag are found everywhere, and it were wilful blindness to fail to see in this an indication that God means the Church of England to be found everywhere, and to be beyond others a missionary Church. Or think of the Church's character. It is a truism to say that our unhappy divisions form one of the most serious hindrances to missionary work. 'To educated heathen,' wrote one who was himself a heathen, 'it is a matter of merriment to see the different sects of Christians keeping up an incessant warfare with each other. Each sect is never tired of pronouncing the mild curse of damnation upon the rest.'\* When such a statement as this can pass current, we cannot but feel that if the kingdoms

\* The *Times*, August 21, 1872.

of the world are to become the kingdom of our LORD and of His CHRIST the reunion of Christendom must not be the dream of a few enthusiasts, but a practical matter, which has a foremost place in our prayers. And here we cannot forget how a French writer has seen in the Church of England, with its firm maintenance of the Apostolic ministry and order, together with its sympathy for the reforming spirit and its jealousy for the supremacy of Holy Scripture, the best hope for a reunited Christendom in the future. 'If ever,' said De Maistre in often-quoted words, 'Christians are to be united, it seems as if the movement must come from the Church of England.'

Thus all things seem to indicate that God in His providence has marked out a special work for our nation and Church in the extension of His kingdom and the fulfilment of the prophecies which describe it. But, alas! how slow, how very slow, we have been to recognise it!

In the sixteenth century the Roman Church could tell a stirring tale of heroism as she recorded the life and labours of one who has justly been called the father of modern missions, St. Francis Xavier, and could point to a long roll of converts—aye, and a noble army of martyrs who had laid down their lives for the faith in far-distant India, and even beyond its shores, in China and Japan, while the English Church was content to do nothing for the spread of the Gospel among the heathen except that on one day, and one day only, in the course of the whole year she offered up a prayer that God would 'have mercy on all



Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics.' That was her sole contribution to the missionary work of the Church of CHRIST. It is indeed strange to think how little recognition there is even now in our Book of Common Prayer of the obligation to pray for the conversion of the heathen, and of the duty of co-operating in the work of foreign missions. Besides the not very happily worded Good Friday Collect to which I have referred, no direct missionary collect is to be found within its covers. In the seventeenth century the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men was added, as well as the service for the baptism of such as are of riper years, which it was thought might be always useful 'for the baptizing of natives in our plantations, and others converted to the Faith.' This was some recognition of the possibility of missionary work being attempted, but, in all conscience, it was meagre enough. There are, of course, some of the collects into which you can *read in* thoughts and aspirations connected with foreign missions, and no earnest Christian can possibly pray the LORD's prayer without making the words 'Thy kingdom come' a real missionary intercession. Yet when we wish to pray for special classes, for our own colonists, for the heathen, for missionaries, for catechumens, for converts, for the Church in any particular quarter of the world, we are compelled to look outside the Prayer-Book for the petitions that we need; and it is a simple truth that 'it hardly seems to have been present to the minds of our great authorities and leaders in compiling that book that



the matter should be in the thoughts of everyone who calls himself a Christian, and that no ordinary service should be considered complete which did not plead, amongst other things, for the spread of the Gospel.\*

And, again, there are few chapters of history which furnish more painful reading to an English Churchman than those which tell the story of the planting and growth of our colonial Empire. It is enough to make us hang our heads for shame as we read how slow the Church has been to go in and possess the land, and how little she realised for centuries that she had any duties at all towards the heathen. The foundation of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge at the end of the seventeenth, and of its offshoot, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in the first year of the eighteenth, century, showed that the consciences of a few earnest-minded men were stirred by the needs of their countrymen and the heathen around and beyond them. But the support which the societies received from the Church at large was miserably inadequate. So cold and dead were Englishmen, that for some years it was found necessary to employ the services of Danish and German missionaries, and those not of our own communion, because no Englishman would offer himself for the work. Again, a hundred years later the formation of the Church Missionary Society gave noble proof that some, at least, of the Church's most devoted sons were

\* *Encyclical Letter of the Lambeth Conference of 1897*, p. 27.

beginning to awake to their responsibilities ; but still the Church at large appeared to sleep the sleep of the dead. Meanwhile, our colonies were spreading on every side, new territories were being opened up, and English folk pouring into them by thousands. Left to themselves, what wonder that too often they lived themselves and allowed their children after them to grow up as 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and without God in the world'? And when the Church did become conscious of their existence, how miserably feeble seemed her efforts to provide for their wants! It sounds almost like a grim pleasantry to hear that so recently as 1829 there was a solemn attempt made to supply the spiritual needs of Australia by making that vast island continent an archdeaconry of India, and that at the same time Churchmen in our South African colony were utterly destitute of episcopal supervision and guidance, and had no opportunity of receiving the grace of confirmation save when some Indian Bishop happened to land at the Cape of Good Hope for two or three days on his voyage to or from his distant diocese. And if the wants of our own people were so wretchedly provided for, it goes without saying that the bitter cry of the heathen world, 'Come over and help us,' fell unheeded on the ears of all but a very few.

The year from which we must date the rise of better things is 1841. In that year Bishop Blomfield pressed upon the consciences of Churchmen his famous truism, 'An episcopal Church without Bishops is a contradiction in terms,' and

the Colonial Bishoprics Fund was established. And what has been the result? Sixty-three years ago, outside the limits of the United Kingdom, there were but *eight* Anglican dioceses—to-day there are *one hundred*.\* Think of that, and you will realise as perhaps you have never done before how recent is the growth of the colonial Church and our missionary dioceses. We cannot forget the noble work done in earlier times by individuals, and the brave struggles of our missionary societies to arouse Churchmen to a sense of their duty, but still, it is no exaggeration to say that the Church in her corporate capacity only began to awake to a sense of her duty and her calling little more than sixty years ago, a time well within the recollection of many who are still living among us. This fact must ever be borne in mind when we are estimating the growth of our foreign missions and the strength of the Church in them. Realise of what recent growth they are, and you will see that we have no cause for discouragement. The wonder is that, having to make up the arrears of two hundred years, during which the Church in the colonies was virtually deprived of episcopal superintendence, they have done so much and grown so fast. Already our episcopate well-nigh girdles the earth, and it has been truly said that 'in the years to come, and those not so very far distant, the vastest volume of worship will be, not in Latin, but in English.'†

\* This, of course, is exclusive of the dioceses of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America.

† Cf. Archbishop Alexander, *Verbum Crucis*, p. 123.

Still, as we think of all that yet remains to be done, as we realise that in India, out of a population of nearly three hundred millions, not many more than two millions are returned as Christians of all denominations, we feel that whatever has been done in the past is but as a drop in the ocean compared with the vastness of the work which still lies before us, and the need is brought home to us of redoubling our prayers, our alms, and our efforts to spread the Gospel to the farthest regions of the earth. 'The isles' still 'wait for His law.' Not until the 'LORD Himself can count, in registering peoples,' of each single one of them, 'This man was born there,' will the Church's work of evangelising the nations be done. Till then be it ours to lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; to work on in spite of failure and discouragement; to do all that lies in our power for the spread of CHRIST'S kingdom on earth, and the fulfilment of the glowing visions of prophecy.

## XIX

### The Study of Church History

Ps. cvi. 2 : 'Who can express the noble acts of the LORD ?'

THERE was an ancient custom in many of our English cathedrals whereby the whole Psalter was parcelled out among the Bishop, and Canons, or Prebendaries, separate psalms being assigned to each, which they were bound by rule to recite every day, wherever they were, so that as an act of praise there might rise to the throne of God the whole Psalter repeated each day throughout the year by the officers of the cathedral church of the diocese. It was a beautiful thought that the ceaseless roar and unbroken cry of sin that goes up from this earth should be drowned by the voice of praise rising from the hearts and voices of God's people, and that each day of the year the hundred and fifty psalms of the Psalter should ascend from the lips of the clergy connected with the mother-church of the diocese, wherever they might be, and that some forty or fifty voices (for so many Canons there anciently were) should contribute their share from town and hamlet, which should mingle and blend

together, and that the fifty voices should weave one single chain of praise, and lay one offering at the feet of GOD. The custom has ceased now, as perhaps it was inevitable that it should cease; but in some cathedrals the recollection of it is kept alive by the titles and first words of the psalms attached to each Canonry being inscribed above the stalls assigned to them in the choir; and in many cases the Canons and Prebendaries still feel that they have a special property in, and attachment to, that psalm or group of psalms, which was anciently connected with the stall which they occupy. So in the seventeenth century at Lincoln, Bishop Sanderson, the author of the Preface to our Book of Common Prayer, when Prebendary of that cathedral, loved to preach to the people sermons on what he fondly called 'my prebendal psalms'; and following the example set by that honoured name, I propose to speak to you on that psalm which is sung in the course of the evening service on the 21st day of the month, which I love to think of as 'my prebendal psalm,' for it was anciently assigned to that stall in Wells Cathedral which it is my privilege to hold to-day.

Psalm cvi. is very closely connected with that which immediately precedes it. Both the 105th and the 106th are what may be called historical psalms, sketching in rapid outline the past history of GOD's people, recalling to the mind of a later generation His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, His preservation of Joseph, the descent of Israel into Egypt, the fortunes of the people there, the wonders of the Exodus, the passage of the

Red Sea, the incidents of the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, the conquest of the land of promise, and the settlement of the chosen people therein. Both psalms cover much the same ground, but they approach the history from different points of view. Psalm cv. celebrates God's unfailing mercies in the past, and is a psalm of thanksgiving. Psalm cvi. confesses Israel's persistent ingratitude and repeated apostasy, and is a psalm of penitence. They are thus complementary to each other, and taken together supply a comprehensive view of past history, recalling to mind on the one hand, for our encouragement, the wonderful works which God has ever done for His people, and on the other, for our warning, reminding us how much of faithlessness on our part there has ever been in response to this wondrous loving-kindness of His; and nothing is more remarkable in these two psalms than the entire absence of any word or sentiment tending to feed the national vanity. All the glory of Israel's history is confessed to be due, not to her heroes, her priests, her prophets, but to God. All the failures which are written upon that history, all discomfitures, losses, reverses, the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, are recognised as the righteous chastisements which the sins of the nation have provoked. Just the same thing holds good of the other historical psalms found in the Psalter as well, such as the 78th, that long psalm for the fifteenth evening, and the 135th, each verse of which contains the refrain 'For His mercy endureth for ever.'



And it is invariably the tone assumed by all the Divinely-instructed teachers of the people—by the prophets in their great sermons, as by the poets in their contributions to the national liturgy. There is no other poetry in the world of a popular and national kind so full of patriotic sentiment, and yet at the same time marked by so complete an abstinence from all those themes which are commonly found in poetry written for the people. There is not a single ode in honour of Moses, or Aaron, or Joshua, or David ; there is not one which sings the glory of the nation, except as that glory is given it of God. The history of the nation, wherever referred to, is referred to, not for the purpose of self-applause or self-commendation, but either for purposes of rebuke of national faithlessness, or for the sake of giving to God the honour and praise that are His due. Well did the Jews understand the value of the appeal to history, and excellently did they use it. In times of anxiety and disaster they would appeal to God by the memory of His past interpositions on their behalf. They were familiar with the story of it all, and could use it as an argument for present help. ‘O God,’ they cried, ‘we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us, what Thou hast done in their time of old.’\* In brighter days and times of rejoicing these same past mercies became to them a constant ground of thankful adoration. ‘O thank the LORD of Lords : for his mercy endureth for ever. Who remembered us when we were in trouble : for His mercy

\* Ps. xliv. 1.

endureth for ever. And delivered us from the hand of the enemy : for His mercy endureth for ever.'\*

Now, the Christian Church is the heir to the promises made to Israel of old, and has succeeded to the position taken in ancient days by God's chosen people. It is not a new Church, but the one old Church of God, which there has been from the beginning ; and consequently in the New Testament the same names and titles are given to it as are attributed to the Jews in the Old Testament. It is 'the Israel of GOD.'† Its members are 'an holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people of GOD's own possession.'‡ They are 'called to be saints';§ they are the 'elect of GOD.'|| All these terms are used first of the Jews in the Old Testament. They are boldly transferred to the Christian Church in the New. It is, I say, but one Church from the beginning. And if, then, to the Church in the earlier ages before the Incarnation God's mighty deeds in the past formed a constant spring of encouragement, a theme to which men never tired of recurring, a never-failing support in times of anxiety, a subject for unceasing praise and thanksgiving, still more should they be all this to the Church of God to-day. We ought to make exactly the same use of history which Israel did ; and—for this is the point which I am most anxious to press—as we have *a new past* and *a new present* in which God's wondrous loving-kindness has been no less constantly manifested than in the ancient days to

\* Ps. cxxxvi. 3, 23, 24.

† 1 Pet. ii. 9.

§ Rom. i. 7.

† Gal. vi. 16.

|| Col. iii. 12.

which Israel looked back so fondly, we should delight to dwell not only on the manifestations of God's goodness recorded in the Old Testament, but on those which have been granted to the Church in every generation of its life. The history of the Christian Church for well-nigh two thousand years ought to appeal to us quite as forcibly, and ought to be quite as familiar as was the history of the patriarchs, the Exodus, and the conquest of the land of promise to the devout Jew in the centuries before the Incarnation. The living God has been present and working among us as surely as ever He did in the old world. We can trace His hand and His loving guidance in the providential ordering of the history of His Church; and the lessons of it all, both of encouragement and of warning, ought to come home to us quite as forcibly as the lessons of their earlier history did to those who first sang the psalm we still use in our worship. But while this is what ought to be, what is the actual fact? Is it not that the vast majority of Church-people think nothing, and care nothing, and know nothing of the history of that Divine society into which they have been baptized, and to which it is their highest privilege to belong?

Some few years ago, it is true, when there was a scare about the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church, a certain number of persons took to reading something about the history of the Church of England. They were glad to buy a little book with pictures, and get up from it a smattering of the subject, which might enable

them to refute the fictions and fancies passed off as sober fact by the agents of the Liberation Society. But the scare passed away, and the little book has been consigned to the highest shelf, and people have sunk back into a state of contented ignorance with regard to the history of the noblest society that the world has ever seen, the lessons of which ought to be present to them at all times, and for other and far higher reasons than merely to resist a passing attack upon the property and position of the Church in this country. And when I speak of the study of history, let me remind you that as the history of the Church does not begin with the period of the Reformation, which was not a beginning but only a turning-point in the course of her history, so neither does it end with the restoration of Charles II. and the last revision of the Prayer-Book in 1662. Its history has been continuous ever since, and full of stirring incident, and it is being made to day as fast as it ever was; and the countries in which it is being made the fastest are those new countries which are being opened up for the first time to the faith of JESUS CHRIST. When the complete history of the Church of GOD in the nineteenth century comes to be written, the longest and most important chapters will be, not those which tell of our miserable ecclesiastical squabbles and struggles about ritual and Church courts, not even those which describe the marvellous and most blessed revival of Church life and order that there has been here in England—rather they will be those which tell the tale of the growth of the English Church in other

lands, and describe its expansion in America, in Australia, in Africa, in India, in China and Japan, and in the isles of the sea. It will be a story of heroic effort, of the weak things of the world chosen to confound the things that are mighty, of martyrdoms as glorious as any in the primitive days, and of self-sacrifice, which will vie for interest with any that has ever yet been written. Such books as 'Deeds that Won the Empire' or 'Fights for the Flag' have fired the enthusiasm of countless readers for the story of the making of our own English Empire. Some day there will be companion volumes written on deeds that won the spiritual empire of Him whom we hail as King of kings, and on the fights that there have been for the blood-red banner beneath which the SON of GOD goes forth to war; and the record of these will be not less thrilling, and not less able to fire the enthusiasm of those whose hearts GOD has touched. And yet of all this the vast majority of Church-people care nothing whatever. They are ashamed of not having read the last new work of fiction, or some volume on secular history of which everybody is talking, but of the history of their own Church, both in the past and in the present, they are content to remain in absolute ignorance. Yet if only they would study it they would discover it to be what Bishop Lightfoot once called it, 'an excellent cordial for drooping spirits.' They would find their own position as Churchmen strengthened, and, as history repeats itself, they would meet with guidance and direction in the controversies and perplexing questions which

come to the front from time to time to-day. There is nothing like the study of Church history to give us confidence in times of anxiety and distress; there is nothing like it to give us brave hopefulness in looking forward to the unknown future; for as we read the records of the past we can see for ourselves—it would be sheer wilful blindness to doubt it—that the promises of CHRIST to His Church have never once been found to fail. She has had her dark days and hours of disaster. There have been times when she seemed tottering to her ruin. In the eighteenth century it is said that Bishop Butler refused the Archbishopric of Canterbury because it was too late to support the Church! But somehow the gates of hell have never been allowed to prevail against her. She has always appeared to men on the verge of an irreparable disaster, but even when disaster has overtaken her men have ever found that—to quote Waller's manly answer to the royal sneer against allying himself with a falling Church—'this falling Church has got a trick of rising again.' Yes; there has been a Divine life in her all along—guiding, controlling and overruling for good the passions and infirmities of men. It is the presence of this Divine life alone that can account for her history. Two men were once sitting in the Deanery at Westminster—the late Dean Stanley and a friend—discussing together the thought of the Church as a Divine society. 'Do you know,' said the friend, 'what first taught me to believe in the Divine life of the Church?' 'No,' was the answer; 'what was it?'



‘Your history of the Eastern Church.’ ‘How so?’ said the Dean. ‘Why, I used to think what giants those men must have been who drew up and framed the Nicene Creed, that Creed which for more than fifteen centuries has been the rallying point of Christendom; but when I came to read your history of the Council, and description of the men themselves, I saw what pigmies they were, and I learned that nothing but a Divine Presence within the Church could have so guided them aright.’

‘Lo, I am with you always.’ There is the promise, and if you doubt it study for yourself the history of the Church, and on every page you will find the evidence of its fulfilment.



## XX

# The Book of Ezekiel

EZEK. xxxiii. 11 : 'Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?'

OF the four greater prophets of Hebrew history, none is less known to us than Ezekiel. Daniel has been a familiar figure to us all from early childhood through the stirring story of the lions' den, and the weird description of the part of a man's hand that startled the revellers at Belshazzar's feast by writing on the wall the mysterious words which spoke of impending doom. Everybody who knows anything of the history of God's chosen people remembers the part played by Isaiah in the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's reign. The prophet was the life and soul of the patriot party, protesting against any alliance with Egypt, and exhorting the people, even in their darkest hour, to a confidence—which the event so signally justified—in Jehovah alone. Jeremiah is perhaps less generally known. His name is never mentioned in the Book of Kings, but you cannot look through his own writings without very soon discovering how full of historical interest

they are, and what an important part the prophet really played in the events of his day. The Book of Jeremiah is full of details and incidents which throw considerable light both on the general history of the times, and also on the character and disposition of the prophet himself. Thus it comes about that we feel as if we knew these three men personally. They live again in the pages of history. Their biographies can be written, and the history of their times can be grouped round them as centres. But with Ezekiel how different the case is! What a shadowy figure to most he is—a name and nothing more! And as for his book, it is less known, perhaps, than any other book of corresponding length in the whole Bible. Just two or three chapters are familiar, as the vision of the dry bones; but the greater part is quite strange to most persons, and if an attempt is made to study it, the sense of bewilderment which the first impression leaves on the mind is so great that the attempt is not seldom abandoned in despair. And yet there is no reason why Ezekiel should be such an entire stranger to us, or why his book should be suffered to drop out of sight and become a sealed volume. I grant you that it is difficult, and requires patient and painstaking study. Of some parts it must candidly be admitted that the interpretation remains to this day wholly uncertain. But there is much in the book which a little careful thought will enable the student to understand, and there are lessons bearing upon life and conduct to be found in its pages which are found nowhere else

with such force in the Old Testament, and which we could ill afford to lose.

I purpose, then, briefly to set before you the prophet and his message. Of his lineage and family all that we know is soon stated. His father's name was Buzi, and he must have belonged to the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron, for it is expressly stated that he was a priest.\* His lot was cast in stirring times. So far as we can calculate, he must have been born shortly before the great religious reformation of Josiah's reign. The boy was probably too young to have any personal recollections of the excitement caused by Hilki'ah's discovery of the book of the law,† but his boyhood must have been profoundly influenced by the religious reformation which it originated—a reformation that can only be paralleled by the yet more famous one in the Christian Church in the sixteenth century after Christ. His childhood, then, was passed under the influence of a religious revival. But just as he was passing from boyhood to early manhood a change was brought about, and there began that series of disasters and catastrophes which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the deportation of the chosen people into the land of their captivity. Thirteen years after the discovery of the book of the law, in the thirty-first year of his reign, Josiah, perhaps in simple loyalty to his Babylonian suzerain, attempted to bar the progress of the Egyptian monarch through the land in his march from the Valley of the Nile

\* Ezek. i. 3.

† See 2 Kings xxii.

to the Euphrates. The attempt ended in hopeless failure, and Josiah himself was slain at Megiddo.\* His death marks the virtual end of the kingdom. The religious reformation came to an end at once. The four kings who followed him were the mere puppets of Egypt or Babylon, and the twenty-two years of their nominal reigns are occupied with successive conquests and deportations. Jehoahaz, the successor of Josiah, was only allowed to remain on the throne for three months before he was carried away captive into Egypt. Jehoiakim was suffered to reign for a longer period, during which, the historian tells us, he 'did evil in the sight of the Lord';† but he reigned only as the vassal, first of Egypt and then of Babylon, and when he rebelled against the latter he was speedily put to death. Then followed another three months' reign, that of Jehoiachin, or Coniah, ending in his deportation to Babylon, together with the nobles and all the upper classes of the land. How profoundly these events influenced Ezekiel, who had not yet received the prophetic call, may be seen from the touching and pathetic elegy which he uttered later on over the princes of Judah, wherein the nation is represented as a mother lioness rearing her whelps, one after another of which learnt to catch the prey, and then was taken by the nations in their pits and caged in captivity, so that his voice was no more heard upon the mountains of Israel.‡ So far Ezekiel had been a silent spectator of his country's ruin; but in the final

\* 2 Kings xxiii. 29.    † 2 Kings xxiii. 37.    ‡ Ezek. xix.

disaster of Jehoiachin's reign he was himself implicated, as we gather that he was among those who were now carried away captive to Babylonia, and there, when his book opens, we find him settled by the banks of the Chebar, in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity. In was in this year that he received his call as a prophet, and saw that wondrous vision of GOD with which his ministry began. For twenty-two years that ministry was to last, 'though briars and thorns might be with' him, and though he might 'dwell among scorpions'\*—twenty-two years throughout which he was to bear his testimony, 'whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.'† Of the outward details of his history during this period we know but little. One tragic episode alone is recorded four years after his ministry had begun. Suddenly GOD took away the desire of his eyes with a stroke. The announcement was made in the morning, and 'at even,' he tells us, 'my wife died.'‡ Tragic as the event was, the prophet, in obedience to GOD's command, converts it into a lesson to his people, and his abstention from mourning becomes a symbol of the stupefaction that shall overtake them at the announcement, so soon to be made, of the actual downfall of the holy city.

But though we know so little of his outward life, his message has been very fully handed down to us, and his prophecies have been carefully preserved. We turn to his book, and we find that his ministry is sharply divided into two

\* ii. 6.

† ii. 5.

‡ xxiv. 18.

periods of unequal length. The former of these lasts from his call in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity to the destruction of Jerusalem some six or seven years later. The prophecies belonging to this period are comprised in the first twenty-four chapters of his book, and in these chapters, with their wealth of allegory and symbolic imagery and action, we can clearly trace a twofold object in the prophet's words.

1. First he sets himself to beat down and dispel for ever the foolish hopes that had been excited in the minds of his fellow-exiles as to a speedy deliverance from the yoke of Babylon, and to this end he proclaims the certain and immediate overthrow of Jerusalem itself.

2. Secondly, he is intent upon bringing to light and exposing the inveterate apostasy and incurable corruption of Judah's capital, as the all-sufficient justification both of the judgments that had already overtaken them and of such as were still impending. Thus at one time, in symbolic action, he takes a tile, and portrays upon it the siege;\* at another he is bidden to eat his bread and drink his water by measure,† to represent the straits to which the people shall be reduced by famine; at another he is to perform the same act with quaking and with trembling,‡ to denote the agitating terror that shall seize them. Now he is caught up by the spirit and transported in vision to Jerusalem, and shown the abominations committed there—men with their faces to the east worshipping the sun, and women

\* iv. 1.

† iv. 11.

‡ xii. 18.



wailing for the death of Adonis in the very courts of the temple.\* Now he is bidden to set a caldron on the fire, as an image of Jerusalem exposed to GOD's judgment, and as the flesh is pulled out of the caldron indiscriminately, so Israel is taught that when the judgment has wrought its work there shall be a universal dispersion.† And now, again, as at the first, he is shown the glory of the LORD, and granted a vision of the Cherubim. But this time he sees them departing from the city and sanctuary, which are profaned and left desolate; for 'then did the Cherubims lift up their wings, and the glory of the GOD of Israel was over them above, and the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city.'‡ So, with symbolic and allegorical teaching and typical actions, he enforces the lessons of judgment in the first part of his book. But with chapter xxv. the second division begins. This is introduced by a section concerning the nations around, describing GOD's judgments on them,§ as preparing the way for Israel's restoration, which forms the theme of the remaining chapters, ending as they do with that wonderful account, so strangely anticipating the last chapters of the Apocalypse, describing the glorious state and condition of the redeemed people who shall dwell in the city whose 'name shall be, The Lord is there.'|| But, different as the two parts of the book are in subject, and, to some extent, in style, there is one feature which is common

\* viii. 13-16.

§ xxv.-xxxii.

† xxiv. 1-5.

‡ x., xi.

|| xl.-xlviii.



to both, and one lesson on which in each section the prophet insists with an emphasis found nowhere else in the Old Testament. It is the lesson of personal, individual freedom and responsibility. It is clearly enunciated in the eighteenth chapter in the first part of the book. It is repeated with similar emphasis in the thirty-third, immediately after the prophecies concerning the nations, and at the head of those which deal with the restoration of the chosen people. Put the two chapters together, and we see very clearly the prophet's aim, and also what was the attitude of mind on the part of the nation which called forth this new revelation of man's freedom and immediate personal relation with God. The nation, as we have seen, was involved in a series of unparalleled calamities and disasters. Upon that generation there seemed to be visited the sins of countless generations who had gone before and passed to their graves in peace. The people, seeing themselves apparently inextricably involved in ruin, were sinking into apathy and despair, and justified themselves for their hopeless attitude on two grounds: (1) 'The fathers,' they said, had 'eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were being set on edge' \*—*i.e.*, they were suffering for the sins of others, and by no possibility could they escape the consequences of their fathers' wrong-doing; and (2) 'Our iniquities be upon us, and we pine away in them. How, then, shall we live?' †—*i.e.*, our own evil past is irremediable. We cannot undo it now. Bad we have made

\* xviii. 3.

† xxxiii. 10.

ourselves, and bad we must continue to the end. It is to this position of hopelessness that Ezekiel addresses himself, and mark how he meets it. By the doctrine of personal responsibility and personal freedom. The emancipation of the individual soul, whether from doom inherited from a former generation, or from one entailed by its own evil past—this, it has been truly said, was perhaps the greatest contribution made by Ezekiel to the religious life and thought of the time.\* Not for one single moment will he admit either of the excuses offered by the people for their apathy and acquiescence in evil. Whichever excuse be pleaded, it is utterly unjustifiable. Clear and distinct his message rings out. No man, he cries, is inexorably involved in the sins of his forefathers. Each single soul stands in immediate personal relation to GOD, as if there were none other in the whole world. ‘What mean ye,’ then, ‘that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the LORD GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine. As the soul of the father, so also the soul of the Son is mine. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. And if the wicked will turn from

\* See A. B. Davidson, *Ezekiel* (Cambridge Bible), p. li.

all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.' And as for your own evil past, with its seemingly iron chain of habit which binds you to it, away with the thought that it is irremediable. Why, such a notion contradicts the very idea of GOD—GOD, who has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but that the wicked should turn from his evil way and live; GOD, who gives place for repentance to all, and pleads with infinite tenderness with his revolting people. 'Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die?'

Here is the essence of Ezekiel's teaching, and this it is which makes it so appropriate for our own days. It is exactly Ezekiel's message that we need to-day, in view of the widespread, tendency to acquiesce in evil as a necessity forced upon us by heredity, or the result of our own evil past, which men are so ready to cry out that it is too late to alter. True, indeed, is it that GOD visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, that there is an awful entail of woe which the drunkard and the profligate may leave to their sons; but true is it also that the power of the SPIRIT is mighty to the pulling down of strongholds of evil, and that there is no iron law of necessity compelling the drunkard's son to grow up a drunkard against his will. Men can rise superior to their surroundings and to their evil tendencies. GOD, who knoweth the hearts of all, can make merciful allowance for inherited predispositions to sins, and His grace can enable

men to overcome them. You can cut off the entail if you will.

And then, as for that evil past of your own, which seems to hold you a prisoner in a chain of habit which you have forged for yourself till it seems as if it never could be broken—here, too, we need Ezekiel's message. It is a *gospel of hope* that you want. Whatever be the past, the one thing you have no right to do is to despair. It was simply despair that prevented the sorrow of Judas from becoming the 'godly sorrow that worketh repentance.' 'Only believe—all things are possible to him that believeth.' By the grace of GOD you can amend, and do better. Then 'turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?'

## XXI

### The Fathers have Eaten Sour Grapes

EZEK. xviii. 2 : 'What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

AN able writer,\* in treating of this text, reminds us that there are two very different ways in which you may ask a person what he means. To begin with, the statement made may be one of which it is hard to understand the import. You read some obscure passage in a difficult book, and, not being able to make it out in the very least, you go to some friend in whose learning and judgment you have confidence, and ask him to explain what it means. That is one way ; but there is also quite another manner in which the question may be put. A man calls you a thief and a liar, and you say at once, 'What do you mean by it?' The words are easy enough to understand, there is no difficulty in them ; but just because they are so plain you are in doubt as to the meaning of the man's conduct.

\* Bishop Harvey Goodwin in *Plain Preaching for a Year*, vol. ii., p. 275.

Now, it is in this latter sense that Ezekiel was bidden to ask the Israelites what they meant by using the proverb in the text, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' As far as the words are concerned, it is not a difficult proverb to understand; but the spirit which prompted Israel to use it and to find comfort in it was one which GOD would severely denounce, and therefore He sends His prophet to ask His people what they meant by their use of the proverb—by their conduct, that is, rather than by the actual words which they used.

The fact was that the Jews were making the proverb into a sort of excuse. It was a time of great national calamity. The Northern tribes had long since been carried away into captivity, and the Davidic monarchy was already tottering to its fall. Already the Chaldæan was at the gates. One king after another had been forced to submit, and large numbers of the nobility and gentry had been carried away into Chaldæa, and little more than the poorest of the people remained.

And in these dark days, in this time of national humiliation and disaster, of judgment and catastrophe, instead of repenting and turning in all lowliness of heart to GOD, the wretched people were consoling themselves with this proverb, and looking on their sufferings, not as a judgment for their sins, but as the natural consequence of the sins of those who had gone before. Their teeth were set on edge because their fathers had eaten sour grapes. This was the thought in which they took refuge. This was their excuse for accepting

the inevitable, finding consolation, as men always will, in the feeling that their calamities were not due to their own fault.

And, mark you, there was much that might have seemed to justify them in their use of the proverb. They might fairly plead that, as a simple matter of fact, it was true that the present troubles were a direct historical consequence of the miserable policy of kings such as Ahaz and others like him. If the law of cause and effect can be traced anywhere in Jewish history it can be traced here; and their teeth *were* set on edge because their fathers had eaten sour grapes. But this was not all. They might also fairly plead that GOD had spoken of Himself as a 'jealous GOD,' and as one who 'visited the sins of the fathers upon the children'; and therefore by GOD's own revelation of Himself were they not justified in the use which they made of the proverb?

And yet Ezekiel is commissioned to denounce them for thus shifting responsibility off their own shoulders, and is sent to teach them the great lesson of individual personal responsibility. It was all true which they urged, only there was another side to it as well. As so often, there was a double truth, the full truth lying not in paring down and explaining away the different sides so as to bring about a reconciliation, but rather in the acceptance of two seemingly opposite truths, which may not be altogether easy to be reconciled, and yet which must both be held frankly and fully if error is to be avoided; and the Jews, like so many others, both before and after, fell into the error of taking



one side of truth alone, and that just the wrong one.

True that their calamities were the consequence of the miserable policy of previous generations, and true that GOD does 'visit the sins of the fathers upon the children'; but yet equally true is it that each individual is answerable for his own conduct—'the soul that sinneth, it shall die'—and all shall be equitably dealt with.

The complete reconciliation may be difficult, but at least we can see that the Jews of Ezekiel's day were not justified in making the proverb an excuse for indolence and indifference. They might have repented and turned to GOD, Who even then would have heard them. There was no blind fate forcing them forwards in the path of apostasy and recklessness. They might have repented, and had they done so, even at the eleventh hour, there was mercy and pardon in store for them.

But enough of the Jews and their misuse of the proverb. Ezekiel's message is a far-reaching one, and I cannot but think that if Ezekiel were here to-day he would say to us, 'What mean ye that ye use this proverb in England, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?' The tendency which Ezekiel rebuked is one which has lived on with marvellous vitality, and it seems as strong to-day as it was three thousand years ago. The form is perhaps a little different, but the unwillingness to acknowledge personal responsibility for sin and failure is just the same. The Jews laid the blame

on the fathers. With us nature is the scapegoat, and as nature is so much a matter of inherited disposition, our excuse comes very close to that of the Jews. 'The law of heredity,' it is said, 'is one which has been, not certainly discovered, but formulated by modern physiology. The influence of physical antecedents upon individuals is immense. Each infant brings into the world with it a flesh and blood which have been specialised by the channel in which they have been moulded since man appeared upon the earth. They have been manufactured in a family factory which has been at work since the family existed. All that St. Paul would call "the flesh" is built up and modified by all—bad and good, moral and physical—which has passed in the lives and habits—nay, in the habitual thoughts—of its progenitors to the first generation. Every infant comes into the world charged and saturated with these antecedent conditions, stamped with an immemorial history, penetrated through and through with imperishable influences.\* So the facts have been stated; and from this it results that, not without some show of reason, men plead nature as an excuse for sins and infirmities, and thus think to shift the guilt of their failures off from their own shoulders on to those of their fathers. We hear much in one class of life of an inherited craving for drink; in another we are told that a man is sprung from a proud family. This one is said to be naturally passionate, while that one is constitutionally indolent. Thus the drunkenness, the pride, the

\* *Church Quarterly Review*, vol. ix., p. 309.

temper, and the indolence are all traced to inherited tendencies. The further our researches are pushed the less, we are told, do we find to praise or to blame in individual action ; and it is implied that the man is no more responsible for his character than he is for the colour of his hair or the height of his stature. 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

The fact must be admitted. The implied inference from the fact must be met with a flat denial. It is all true that men do come into the world and grow up with inherited tendencies and predispositions to certain sins. But this is no excuse for yielding to sin. If the Jews of Ezekiel's day were not justified in their excuse—and we have seen that they were not—no more are we ; and this for two reasons : (1) The moral trial of man lies in rightly using the whole contexture of circumstances in which he has providentially been placed, and these preliminary conditions of natural disposition among the rest ; and (2) grace is freely given to discipline and, if need be, to counteract nature. There is no stern law of necessity, enforced with an iron hand, which compels the drunkard's son to grow up a drunkard, or the constitutionally indolent man to remain a sluggard to the end of the chapter. Some temptations come to us almost wholly from without, others almost wholly from within. If we are responsible for yielding to the solicitations of the one (as all will readily admit), there is no sort of reason why we are not responsible for yielding to the other also. If you are born with a naturally

weak constitution, you accept the fact, but you do not simply acquiesce in it as a necessity which nothing can affect. You seek the best advice and remedies, and do all in your power to strengthen that which is weak and overcome the inherited delicacy. Just so, if you are born with some moral weakness and infirmity, you have no right tamely to acquiesce in it. It is yours to struggle against it and fight with it, and you will have to answer for it hereafter if you treat it as a necessity. You can cut off the entail if you will ; for in this struggle with nature (God knows what a hard one it is for us all !) you are not left to yourself. The very purpose and object for which supernatural grace is given is to discipline and purify and refine this poor fallen and perverted nature of ours.

Just as in the physical world all around us man makes use of natural forces and guides and directs them as he will, so in the spiritual world within grace can lay hold of nature and do anything with it. Think of all the natural forces around us. How they run to waste till the genius of man steps in to guide and control them ! Water and steam, for instance, or the mysterious electric current : there they are—what we call natural forces, but all running to waste, all simply idle, or even destructive, till prisoned, cabined, and confined by the art of man ; and then—well, you can do almost anything with them. You turn your mills, and you drive your steam-engines, and you put a girdle round the earth in forty seconds, and all this simply because you have utilised and directed and mastered the forces of nature. And

so in man. What man can do with the external forces around him, that the grace of God can do in the nature of man. Just as the powers and forces of this world are simply wasted and desolating until man's controlling hand is there to guide and direct, so without grace all your powers and forces will run to waste and devastate the garden of the soul. We make nature and natural disposition an excuse for sin; but, *of course*, nature will run to waste if left alone. And where Divine grace is ever ready to refine, ennoble, and purify, there we are not justified in acquiescing in our faults being natural, any more than the farmer is justified in leaving his lands undrained and his fields one mass of weeds because, forsooth, it is 'natural.' No; it is no excuse for us that 'the fathers have eaten sour grapes.' Even if it be so, there is no necessity that our 'teeth' should be 'set on edge.'

And here comes in a grand and helpful thought: that just those very forces which, if left to themselves, will work our ruin are those which, when guided and directed aright by grace, will do most for God. Let me give one example of a truth which is very far-reaching in its application:

'How many a father have I seen,  
A sober man, among his boys,  
Whose youth was full of foolish noise,  
Who wears his manhood hale and green? \*

So sings the poet in familiar words; but I will go

\* Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, lii.

further, and venture to say that I have sometimes seen such a one, who not merely 'wears his manhood hale and green,' but dedicates his whole life and all its powers to the service of CHRIST ; for just those healthy animal spirits and that vigour of joyous life which leads to the 'foolish noise' and the buffoonery, that giant strength which must expend itself on something, and finds its natural outlet on the river or in the cricket-field, and which, when no nobler object is at hand, leads a man to let off steam in bear-fighting—all this strong mighty force, which, if left to itself, will simply run to waste, is just what Divine grace loves to lay hold of and utilise for the evangelisation of the world. We have seen it in Selwyn and Patteson and Hannington in the past, and the records of our public school and college missions will show us the same thing in scores of cases to-day.

Time forbids me to follow out this line of thought further ; but sufficient has perhaps been said to show the folly of making natural disposition and inclination an excuse for acquiescing in bad habits and failures. Only I cannot leave the subject altogether without pointing out that if grace is to work upon and purify nature, then nature must submit to discipline.

Grace cannot work upon you without your feeling it. It must press upon you hardly at times, directing you here, controlling you there, guiding you in one direction and checking you in another. But all this implies difficulty and discipline and chastening, and 'no chastening for the present



seemeth to be joyous, but grievous';\* and so the natural man shrinks from it, and says that he doesn't believe in rules and doesn't see the good of discipline, which means that he is going to let his nature run to waste. But to give up just because the discipline is hard and presses on you is to lose the very end and object for which it was undertaken. If it is to be of any use it must be *felt*, for if it is not felt, then it is not directing or influencing nature. Persevere in submitting to it, and then by the grace of the HOLY SPIRIT the whole character will be purified and ennobled and refined. Yes; it will work like the refiner's fire of which we hear so much in Scripture. Do you know why that is such an apt image for the chastening judgment and discipline of GOD? I will tell you, and then I have done.

When silver was refined in the furnace, the refiner knew that the process was complete by this sign. That which told him that the work was done was the parting of the floating dross, and the reflection of his own image from the surface of the pure metal beneath. And just so, when GOD would refine us in the furnace of discipline and chastening, the sign that His work is complete is given when the dross on the surface parts, and bending down over us, GOD sees His own image and likeness reflected as in the pure metal beneath, and mirrored without a flaw in the soul which is renewed after the likeness of His dear SON.

\* Heb xii. 11.



## XXII

### The Day of the LORD

AMOS. v. 18: 'The day of the LORD.'

THE expression is one which was no less familiar to Jewish than it is to Christian ears. It occurs in the earliest of the prophets as a well-known phrase that needs no explanation. It comes to us as part of the national belief and expectation even in the earliest period of Israel's history. But what are the associations which to the Jew the word would call up?

To us 'the day of the LORD' suggests mainly the thought of the calm judicial proceedings of the law-courts, the great assize, the judge on the judgment-seat, the books opened, and the sentence pronounced. But to the Jew there can be little doubt that the picture which the phrase would call up was not that of the judgment hall, but rather of the battlefield. 'The day of Jehovah' would mean the day of His victory over His foes. The thought of judgment would not be absent, because the victory over His enemies involved as its consequences their sentence and destruction. But the associations are not those of the law-

court and assize so much as of the sack of a conquered city, some Jericho which was placed under the ban, the swift, short shrift meted out to the conquered on the field of battle. It is only in this way that the thought of judgment comes in. But when read with this other thought of the battle-day in the mind, the imagery and symbolism of the prophets is at once easily understood. We see now the appropriateness of the summons, not only to 'sound the trumpet'—that might do for either—but also to 'set up the standard.\*' The dreadful significance of Joel's 'blood and fire and pillars of smoke'† is immediately apparent. These have nothing to do with the law-court. It is the sack of the conquered city that they set before us. We see also for the first time the full force of the stern reminder of Amos, and understand how (in the expressive phrase of a modern writer) he 'takes the popular conception and turns it upside down.‡' The day of the LORD being the day of His victory was a time which the oppressed and down-trodden might well long for, and to which they would look forward with eager expectation. It would be the day of Israel's triumph, and under the influence of national solidarity every Jew was taught to hope for a share in the glories of it. Thus the frivolous, voluptuous, luxurious population, led away by the false prophets of Samaria, liked to speak of it as something which should be wistfully longed for.

\* As, e.g., in Isa. xviii. 3 and elsewhere.

† Joel ii. 30.

‡ W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 396 (ed. 1).

They were always talking about it as a good time coming, till Amos turned on them with the stern reminder that the day of Jehovah's might would not necessarily prove a day of victory to Israel over foreign powers, but a day in which His righteousness would be vindicated against the sinners of Israel, as well as of the nations. 'Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD. Wherefore would ye have the day of the LORD? It is darkness and not light.'

In similar tones prophet after prophet takes up the thought, and emphasises the seriousness of this day and the manner in which it must be regarded as bringing a judgment upon all that is wrong, forcing home upon the conscience of the people the thought that its terrors were not all for the oppressors of Israel, but that they themselves, children of Abraham, members of God's chosen race, might be found in the ranks of His enemies, and that on them and all their works the judgment would fall. So Isaiah, and Joel, and Zephaniah, and Malachi; the last of the series bringing out perhaps more clearly than any before him the double character (so to speak) of that day, according to the hearts and dispositions of those on whom it should dawn. 'For the day cometh; it shall burn as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up. . . . But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.'\*

\* Mal. iv. 1, 2.

We turn over a few pages in our Bibles, and pass from these anticipations of the prophets straight to the opening of the Gospel story. And as we listen to the Evangelist telling us that 'suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men,'\* it is difficult to realise that the great and terrible day spoken of by the prophets had dawned. The prophecies which speak of it are certainly among those which Bacon describes as having 'springing and germinant accomplishment.'† Jehovah's day might come upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations of Western Asia in the chastening judgments which fell upon them from the Assyrian and Chaldean invader. The prophecies are not history written down beforehand, so much as the announcement of eternal principles which admit of repeated fulfilment wherever the same conditions are found, whether in ancient Nineveh and Babylon or in modern London and Paris and New York. But yet, if we set ourselves seriously to consider the matter, we can scarcely doubt that whatever partial or incomplete accomplishments there may have been earlier, the complete fulfilment of these Old Testament prophecies of the day of the LORD must be found in the Incarnation of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, which brought with it the rejection of the Jewish Church and the judgment upon Israel.

\* Luke ii. 14.

† *Advancement of Learning*, book ii.

That was the consummation of an age, the close of a dispensation, the manifestation of God's righteousness, and the vindication of His cause, as no other event in the world's history had ever been—as no other event *but one* can ever be. And it is significant that some of the most striking passages in which the day of the LORD is described in the Old Testament are cited in the New as fulfilled in the events connected with our LORD's first coming. At the day of Pentecost St. Peter claims that already the words of Joel are being fulfilled, which speak not only of God pouring forth His Spirit upon all flesh, but also of 'wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire, and vapour of smoke.'\* At the Council of Jerusalem St. James quotes words of Amos descriptive of events to follow after the day of the LORD, and says that they are already being fulfilled.† And it will be in the recollection of everybody that in the Gospels the language of Malachi about the forerunner, the 'messenger' to be sent 'before the great and terrible day of the LORD,' is connected with the mission of the Baptist, and its fulfilment seen in his work.‡ All this is surely significant. And when we penetrate beneath the surface, and look behind the symbols of prophetic imagery to the great realities which they are intended to represent, we can see how that day round which all our softest and tenderest associations gather ;

\* Acts ii. 16-21.

† *Ibid.*, xv. 16 ; *cf.* Amos ix. 11, 12.

‡ *E.g.*, in Mark i. 2.

that day to which we look back as the birthday of all our hope and joy ; that day that is bright with the ripple of the sunshine round a little child's head, as Mary bends for the first time over the cradle of her son, was to the Jews a day of judgment such as the prophets described it. 'This child is set for the fall as well as for the rising of many in Israel.'\* Such was the announce-made while He was yet in His infancy, and all through His ministry we can see how true the words were. There was a constant sifting process going on ; and after the act of national rejection had culminated in the crucifixion, there was yet a period of forty years' grace—forty years, that mysterious time of probation—and then, in the horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem and the downfall of Judaism, the judgment was consummated, and in all its dread terrors to them 'the great and terrible day of the LORD' had come.

Still, however, throughout the New Testament we hear of a 'day of the LORD' as yet to come. It has been said† with some truth that the chief message of Scripture to man might be summed up in three sentences: 'He is coming.' 'He is come.' 'He is coming again.' And so the Apostolic writers, who bear witness to the fact that the day spoken of by the prophets has come, speak with equal clearness of another day still to come in the future. Sometimes, as in St. John's Epistles,‡ it is called 'the day of judgment,' a phrase which the Apostle must have heard more

\* Luke ii. 34.

† By Godet.

‡ 1 John iv. 17.

than once from his Master's lips.\* More often it is, as in the Old Testament, 'the day of the LORD,'† or 'of JESUS CHRIST,'‡ or 'of CHRIST.'§ Sometimes, with the emphasis of reserve, it is simply 'the day.'|| But whatever the exact phrase, it is remarkable to notice how, though the old associations of the battlefield still linger on, and here and there reappear, yet they are no longer prominent. The dominant thought is now that of the judgment-hall, and the scene set before us is that of the court of justice, the judge upon his seat, and the calm judicial proceedings of the Roman basilica. 'We must all stand before the judgment-seat of CHRIST.'¶ 'I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before GOD, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of Life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works.'\*\*

The contrast between the Old Testament and the New in this matter is most suggestive, and shows us what a real advance in the whole conception of justice has been made. In ruder ages the only way in which right can be enforced and justice secured is by the appeal to the sword and the proof given on the field of battle by the side on which right lies, showing it is the stronger.

Hence, when the Jew would think of GOD

\* Matt. x. 15; xi. 22, 24; xii. 36.

† 1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. i. 14; 1 Thess. v. 2.

‡ 1 Cor. i. 8. § Phil. ii. 16.

|| 1 Cor. iii. 13.

¶ Rom. xiv. 10; 2 Cor. v. 10.

\*\* Rev. xx. 12.



manifesting Himself as the righteous judge, it was under the image of the conqueror that he conceived of Him ; and Jehovah's day was the day of battle, in which he was victorious over His foes and consigned them to their merited doom. But, after all, such justice as that which is enforced by the appeal to the sword is anything but exact. Given an army of Galahads, and the perfect justice of the cause of the winning side, yet at what a cost is the victory secured ! To win a battle is only less dreadful than to lose one. There are widows and orphans on the side of the victors as well as on the side of the vanquished. The sufferings entailed by the campaign fall heaviest on those who deserve them least. The cottages and homesteads of the innocent peasants go up in flames before ever the castles and towers of the tyrants are reached. Substantial justice may be done in the end. But the picture which the thought of the battlefield sets before us is not that which we have learnt to look upon as the representative of perfect, even-handed justice, which metes out to every man according to his deeds.

For this you must look elsewhere. You must draw your illustration of it from the calm, dispassionate sentence of the judge, who sets free the innocent and falsely accused ; and who, while rendering to the high-handed evil doer according to his deserts, yet knows how to balance the guilt, and in awarding his sentence takes into consideration the weakness of human nature and recollects that

‘Earthly power doth then show likest God’s  
When mercy seasons justice.’\*

And therefore it is that when we pass from the preparatory teaching of the Old Testament to the final revelation which God has made in His Son, we find that this rather than the other is the dominant thought set before us in connection with the day of the LORD. It is because it is free from all associations of undeserved suffering; because it has no terrors for the peaceful and law-abiding; because it can right one wrong without creating another, that it is better fitted than the other figure to set before us that triumph of Divine righteousness, that victory over sin, and consequent condemnation of all that has been ranged on the side of evil and opposed to God, for which we look at the last day.

There is one other thought connected with the day of the LORD on which we should do well sometimes to reflect.

To the Jews the day of the LORD was very much what they themselves made it. To some it brought the consolation for which they had waited for years. To some it brought destruction and death. Its effect was like the action of the sun’s heat on wax and clay. There were those whose hearts were softened and melted like wax, as they yielded to the gracious influence and the warmth of that Divine presence which was manifested among men. There were others exposed to the very same influences, bathed in the sunshine of

\* Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV., Scene 1.

the same Divine presence, warmed by the fire of the same Divine love, seeing the same signs, hearing the same gracious words, blessed with the same example and teaching, who yet, like the clay, were only rendered harder and drier, until their whole characters split and cracked and crumbled to pieces beneath the touch of that same loving hand by which the others were fashioned and moulded into the likeness of saints. The things that should have been for their wealth became unto them an occasion of falling. The day was to them what they themselves made it. To Simeon, to Anna, to the holy women, to the Twelve, to Nicodemus, and to many another unknown saint of GOD who waited for the consolation of Israel, its dawn brought, as Malachi had said it would bring, the rise of the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings.

These, and such as these, found that while the heavens and the earth were shaken, when the foundations of their national life were cast down, yet still the LORD was a refuge unto His people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel. It might have proved such a day of redemption to all. But to Judas and Annas and Caiaphas, to the Pharisees, and to the nation as a whole, it became what the prophets had foretold that it would become, and what they themselves made it — ‘a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.’\* It brought their sentence upon them—‘for this,’ says one who saw it all, and

\* Zeph. i. 15.

marked the fulfilment, 'is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil.'\*

And now, as at this Advent season, our thoughts irresistibly turn to that other day in the unknown future, it is well that we should realise that it also will be to us exactly what we make it. *It may be* the day of redemption, the brightest hour we have ever known. *It may be* the darkest. One or other it must be ; and out of the same material, the same circumstances, surroundings, trials, and opportunities, you may make it which you will. By our attitude towards these external things, and our use of them, our characters are being built up bit by bit now ; and then it will be seen on which side we are. On that depends the aspect which the day will present to us. We, too, as well as the Jews, are like the wax and clay, softened or hardened by the same influences of Divine love. Only use the opportunities which God has given you, and the grace which He offers you, and every difficulty, trial, and temptation may be turned into a means of grace through which you may be prepared to take your place hereafter in the ranks of the redeemed. Fail to use them, and the very things which should have been for your wealth will become unto you an occasion of falling, and the character, which might have been purified and ennobled and fitted for the highest place in heaven, will, by means of the very same

\* John iii. 19.

influences, be lowered and degraded until it is fit only for the lowest place in hell.

An artist was once showing to a friend a sketch of St. Michael and the Dragon. It was very different in character and conception from the ordinary conventional representations of the scene and the friend by some expression of surprise showed that he did not understand it. 'Oh, don't you see,' cried the artist, '*it's the same man spoilt!*' And when his friend looked again he saw that sure enough it was so. There in the upper part of the picture the features—transfigured to an angelic holiness—were those of the man who had wrestled and fought with temptation, and had at last emerged as victor, stronger and nobler and purer for the struggle. And there in the features of the fallen angel, who lay crushed beneath his feet you could recognise the lines of the same face—coarsened and brutalised by sin indulged and yielded to. You saw that it was indeed *the same man spoilt*. Both had started alike, with the same capacities, the same surroundings, the same opportunities of good, the same allurements to evil. They might have changed places; for to each the outcome was what he himself made it. It is the universal law of God's dealings with us. We shall each one find it to be so in that day.

## XXIII

### Betting and Gambling

HAG. i. 6: 'He that earneth wages, earneth wages to put into a bag with holes.'

THAT is an expressive figure for needless waste and loss incurred by stupid folly. The profit of a man's labour vanishes as completely as if, instead of being carefully secured, it had been heedlessly thrown into a bag full of holes. It would be hard to find any figure which furnishes a more apt description of what happens when a working man, the wage-earner, allows himself to be mastered by the passion for betting and gambling, which is at the present time ruining so many among us. It is of this that I propose to speak in this address, for I feel that the report of the Committee of the House of Lords just issued on this subject\* throws a grave responsibility on the Church at large. It is often said that you cannot make a man moral by Act of Parliament; and, without admitting the complete accuracy of the statement, there is no doubt that the main function of legislation with

\* *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Betting, with the Proceedings of the Committee, Session 1902.*

regard to morals is rather to diminish the opportunities and occasions of wrong-doing, and to remove temptations from the path of the weak, while it is left to such agencies as the Christian Church to regenerate character and to strengthen men to resist temptation, and thus (in the stricter sense of the words) to make them moral. If, then, it is admitted that a widespread evil exists in our midst, even though suggestions are made for diminishing it by legislation, yet these will never be really effectual unless the Church does her part, and sets herself resolutely to the task of grappling with the evil until it be destroyed. And towards this she must labour in two ways: (1) By creating a sound public opinion in favour of the legislation suggested; and (2) by so working on the minds and consciences of men and improving their characters that by the grace of God they become strong to resist temptation and repel altogether the evil. Now, the fact that a great and growing evil connected with betting exists in our midst is notorious. You may say that it needed no Committee of the House of Lords to tell us this, and that in every large town, we know only too well how the practice of betting has spread from men to boys, and even to women and girls, and how much ruin and misery it is causing. Ask the Chief Constable of our city, ask the masters of any of our great works, and with one voice all will tell you without a moment's hesitation that betting and gambling are working as widespread havoc in the lives of the people as any other vice that can be named. Some of us



know this only too well ; but there are others, perhaps, who, not seeing the evil itself, may be inclined to doubt its widespread character, and to them I commend the study of the report just issued—a report drawn up and signed, it must be remembered, not by men representing one point of view only, but by the representatives of the sporting world as well as of the Church, and those who might be supposed to be critical and unbiassed observers. Study their unanimous report, I say, and you will find that they begin by saying that, after hearing much evidence, they ‘are of opinion that betting is generally prevalent in the United Kingdom, and that the practice has considerably increased of late years, especially among the working classes,’ and they go on to say that although they ‘do not look upon betting as a crime in itself, yet they deplore the spread of a practice which, when carried to excess, they consider opposed to the true interests of sport, injurious to the general community, and apt to degenerate into one of the worst and most mischievous forms of gambling.’\* And to quote one more passage, they say lower down that ‘it has been proved conclusively to the Committee that the practice of betting in the streets has increased very much of late years, and is the cause of most of the evil arising from betting among the working classes. The fact that bookmakers can ply their trade in the open street, and lie in wait to catch working men in their dinner-hour outside factories and workshops in order to induce them to bet, is

\* *Report*, p. x.

undoubtedly a great source of evil. Evidence has also been brought before the Committee to show that street bookmakers bet, not only with men, but also with women and children.\*

There is nothing in all this that will be new to most of us, but it is well to have it thus authoritatively stated, because there are always plenty of people ready to deny the existence of those things which do not obtrude themselves upon their notice, and to declare that the harm has been greatly exaggerated. On the reforms which the Committee suggest I need not dwell. Briefly, they amount to this: (1) A recommendation that tipsters' advertisements in newspapers should be made illegal, as well as betting circulars and notices; and (2) that more stringent laws be made to put down street betting and betting with young people, and that greater facilities be given for the police to put down betting at horse-races and athletic meetings. I leave these, however, with the remark that it must be obvious to all that these reforms, if carried out, will only touch a very small part of the evil, and certainly will not stamp it out, and I pass on to what I am especially anxious to dwell on now—viz., this, that while we can all see the harm of excessive betting, and the shameful wrong-doing of those who allow their passion for it so to master them that they will risk their all, and bring ruin, not on themselves alone, but on home and wife and children as well, yet the question, What's the harm of betting in moderation? is one which it is so diffi-

\* *Report*, p. vii.

cult to answer convincingly that many allow themselves with a clear conscience to indulge in the practice, and only discover when it is too late how the passion has taken hold of them, and what a curse and slavery it has become. I cannot help feeling that the great difficulty which there is in drawing the line between what may be an innocent amusement and what is immoral and sinful is responsible for a good deal, and that if men could be brought to see that the beginnings of this practice were wrong, they would not so lightly enter upon a course which has so often proved the ruin of those who have followed it. I frankly confess, however, that it is hard to say precisely wherein lies the sin of making a bet where both parties can well afford the risk they run of losing, just as it is hard to say wherein lies the sin of playing cards for small stakes under similar circumstances. I cannot honestly say that my intellect is satisfied with the formal proofs of the wicked character of all betting and gambling, even of the slightest character, which I find in the books which I have consulted and in some sermons preached on the subject, and yet I have not the shadow of a doubt in my own mind that he is acting wisely and rightly who makes it an absolute rule never to make a single bet, or to play cards for money, however small the stake; and that he is running a grave risk and exposing himself to a needless temptation who allows in himself the beginnings, however innocent they may be in themselves, of a practice which is proved to be fraught with such enormous dangers.

Let me put it to you in a way which I have found helpful to myself when trying to argue it out. You may not be able to draw a sharp line between what is innocent on the one side and what is wrong and immoral on the other, marking out precisely where the one ends and the other begins. But if this is so, it is only a difficulty which we often meet with elsewhere. One thing shades off into another. There are many cases where we have to be content not to draw such a single line, stating categorically that all on one side is innocent and all on the other side wicked ; but what we have sometimes to do is this—to draw two lines at some distance from each other, enclosing in the space between them what is doubtful and debatable. We can then say distinctly that all on this side of the first line is innocent, and all beyond the second is wrong ; but if asked where is the line to be placed which actually separates the one from the other, we must frankly confess that we cannot tell, but that it must be somewhere within the doubtful ground enclosed between the two lines already drawn ; and therefore, in the face of this difficulty, it is wise and good to keep at a safe distance from all that is doubtful and uncertain, and, in practice, to stop on the near side of the line first drawn, even though one may be willing to admit in theory that a good deal may be innocent and harmless beyond it. That is, I believe, the right position for a Christian man to take up in this case. It is certainly one which, if followed, will help him to offer his daily prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation,' free from the

uneasy consciousness that all the while he is deliberately courting a downfall and playing on the edge of a precipice ; for, if he thinks at all seriously, he will, I am sure, feel that all experience shows the appalling nature of the evil resulting from betting, and the difficulty of stopping when once a man has begun ; and he will be able to lift up his voice freely to stop those whom he sees entering so lightly on the downward path, thinking no evil, but allowing themselves to indulge in that which has proved the ruin of so many before them. In the *Life of Charles Kingsley* there are two striking letters on the subject, to which reference may well be made. One is to his son, then a schoolboy, who, boylike, and without thought of wrong, had put into a lottery on the Derby, and had told his father of it in a letter home. Kingsley was no Puritan, and the last man in the world to *invent* sins or to make conscience uneasy without reason. But he wrote at once to warn his son of the danger, pointing out that of all habits gambling was the one which he hated most and had avoided most. ‘Of all habits it grows most on eager minds. Success and loss alike make it grow. Of all habits, however much civilised men may give way to it, it is one of the most intrinsically savage. Historically, it has been the peace excitement of the lowest brutes in human form for ages past. Morally, it is unchivalrous and unchristian.’ And he ends the letter as follows : ‘Betting is the way of the world. So are all the seven deadly sins under certain rules and pretty names, but to the

devil they lead if indulged in, in spite of the wise world and its ways.' The other letter was written to the young men of Chester in view of the race-week there and the dangers it involved them in; and in this Kingsley, with his usual courage and manly frankness, tells them of his own experience in early life, when he himself had been attracted to race-meetings by his love of sport. 'Even then,' he says, 'before I took Holy Orders, before even I thought seriously at all, things were so bad that I found myself forced to turn my back on racecourses, not because I did not love to see the horses run—in that old English pleasure, taken simply and alone, I can fully sympathise—but because I found that they tempted me to betting, and that betting tempted me to company and to passions unworthy, not merely of a scholar and a gentleman, but of an honest and rational bargeman or collier. And I have seen what comes too often of keeping that company, of indulging those passions. I have known men possessed of many virtues and surrounded with every blessing which God could give bring bitter shame and ruin, not only on themselves, but on those they loved, because they were too weak to shake off the one passion of betting and gambling. And I have known men mixed up in the wicked ways of the world, and too often yielding to them, and falling into much wrong-doing, who have somehow steered through at last, and escaped ruin, and settled down into a respectable and useful old age, simply because they had strength enough to say, "Whatever else I may or may not



do, bet and gamble I will not." And I very seriously advise my good friends to make the same resolution, and to keep it.\* There is a testimony from one whose love of all that was manly and noble made him a power for good with young men, such as few others in his generation became, and his words should not be forgotten. And now listen to the pathetic confessions of one who, moving in the best society of the day, capable of keen interest in better things and nobler pursuits, was yet for years a slave to what he mournfully confessed was 'a demoralising drudgery.' Few books of its kind are more interesting than *Greville's Memoirs*, and very striking are the passages in which again and again he confides to the pages of his private diary his loathing and detestation of the habit he had allowed himself to contract, and his consciousness of his degradation and deterioration from it. His life, he says (and this was just after he had won £9,000), was 'spent in the alternations of excitement from the amusement and speculation of the turf, and of remorse and shame at the pursuit itself.' 'Nothing,' he says elsewhere, 'but the hope of gain would induce me to go through this demoralising drudgery, which I am conscious reduces me to the level of all that is most disreputable and despicable, for my thoughts are eternally absorbed by it. Jockeys, trainers, and blacklegs are my companions, and it is like dram-drinking; having once entered upon it, I cannot

\* *Charles Kingsley, his Letters and Memories of his Life*, vol. ii., pp. 360-366.



leave it off, though I am disgusted with the occupation all the time.' And, once more, 'the continual disappointments and difficulties incident to it which harass the mind, the life it compels one to lead, the intimacies arising out of it, the associates, the war against villainy and trickery, being haunted by continual suspicions, discovering the untrustworthiness of one's most intimate friends, the necessity of insincerity and concealment sometimes where one feels that one ought, and would desire to be, most open; then the degrading nature of the occupation itself, mixing with the lowest of mankind, and absorbed in the business for the sole purpose of getting money, the consciousness of a sort of degradation of intellect, the conviction of the deteriorating effects upon the feelings and understanding which are produced, the sort of dram-drinking excitement of it—all these things and these thoughts torment me, and often turn my pleasure to pain.'\* These are the confessions of a man who was not a religious man, and who yet evidently thoroughly despised himself for yielding to what he felt was so utterly lowering and degrading to his character as an honest man. With our eye on such statements as these, and with our knowledge of all the misery and demoralisation that is going on among us, can we not all do something to create a sounder public opinion on the subject, and determine that, so far as our influence can extend, we will set our faces resolutely against it,

\* See the *Greville Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 21; ii., p. 382; iii., p. 143.

and do all in our power, not merely to keep clear of it ourselves—that, perhaps, is an easy thing for most of those who have not yielded to it in early life—but to warn off others from the beginnings of it. A word of warning to a lad such as that given by Charles Kingsley to his son may make all the difference to him in his whole after-life. And if there are any here who still feel that it may sometimes be hard to refuse to make a bet, or to play for money for a trifling sum, when the question What's the harm? is asked, let them remember the admirable rule which that most sensible of women, Mrs. Wesley, gave to her son John: 'Take this rule,' she said. 'Whatever impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes the relish off spiritual things, that thing is sin *to you*, however innocent it may be in itself.'\* Tried by that rule, there are many things which, however innocent in themselves, will be seen to be sin to us, and I cannot but think that you will find that the matter which I have just brought before you is among the number.

\* See Julia Wedgewood's *John Wesley*, p. 34.

## XXIV

### The Apocrypha

JER. vi. 16: 'Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.'

FOR three weeks of the year we read as the first lessons in the daily services selections from those books, which, as the sixth of our Thirty-nine Articles says, 'the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners, but doth not apply to establish any doctrine.' It is a real misfortune that these books, which we commonly term the Apocrypha, should be so little known, and that their true position and value should be so little understood. The practice—in itself an entirely modern one—of issuing Bibles without them is largely responsible for the fact that they are in all probability less familiar now than they were in any previous century of the Church's history, either before or after the Reformation; and allusions in the literature of earlier days, which spoke for themselves and were easily understood by our fathers, require in the present day some explanation or commentary in order to render them intelligible. Everybody, for instance, is

perfectly familiar with Shylock's famous exclamation, which has passed into a proverb, 'A Daniel come to judgment—yea, a Daniel!'<sup>\*</sup> but how many readers of Shakespeare have ever realised that there is nothing in the canonical Book of Daniel which really accounts for it, and that to understand how Daniel became a sort of embodiment of the character of the wise judge intervening in the last extremity, they must refer to the story of Susanna and the Elders, which forms one of the Apocryphal additions to it? or how many readers of Milton catch the meaning of his allusion to Raphael as 'the affable archangel,' or as

'The sociable spirit, that deigned  
To travel with Tobias, and secured  
His marriage with the seven-times-wedded maid'<sup>†</sup>

So everybody knows the saying that 'Great is truth and will prevail,' but how many could tell where it came from or what originated it?<sup>‡</sup> Moreover, the use of certain Christian names is an indication of the influence which some of these books once possessed, and of the popularity they enjoyed. Toby and Judith have nearly fallen out of use now, but they were once common among us, while Susan has not lost its popularity yet; but it would never have been heard of but for the story just alluded to.

Far more interesting, however, as a witness to a familiarity with these books, in a quarter where

<sup>\*</sup> *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV., scene 1.

<sup>†</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book v., 221.

<sup>‡</sup> 1 Esdras iv. 41, *Magna est veritas, et prævalet.*

we should hardly have expected it, is the description which John Bunyan gives in his autobiographical sketch entitled *Grace Abounding* of the way in which he was roused from a state of religious despondency by the recollection of a text which he found in the Apocrypha. Here is his own account of it : ' For several days I was greatly perplexed, and was ready to sink with faintness in my mind ; but one day, when I had been so many weeks oppressed, and was giving up all hope of ever attaining life, that sentence fell with weight upon my spirit : " Look at the generations of old, and see ; did ever any trust in the LORD and was confounded ? " I looked in my Bible, and found it not. For above a year I searched in vain. But at last, casting my eye into the Apocryphal books, I found it in Ecclus. ii. 10. This at first did somewhat daunt me ; but it troubled me less when I considered that, though it was not in those texts which we call holy and canonical, yet, forasmuch as this sentence was the sum and substance of many of the promises, it was my duty to take the comfort of it, and I bless God for that word, for it was of GOD to me. That word doth still at times shine before my face.'\*

Bunyan was perfectly right to take the comfort of it. It is a real misfortune that persons should so generally cut themselves off from the help which they might get from a closer acquaintance with some of these books than is ordinarily nowadays possessed. Before, however, I proceed to

\* *Grace Abounding*, § 62.

point out in what the real value of the Apocrypha consists, let me say something of its origin, and of the position which the Church of England has assigned to it.

II. It is known to most persons, and should be known to all, that one grave difference between the teaching of the Church of England and the Church of Rome is concerned with this position. The Church of Rome makes no difference whatever between the books of the Apocrypha and the other books of the Old and New Testament which we regard as Canonical. She places them all (except 3 and 4 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasses) on a level as inspired and Canonical Scripture, whereas the Anglican Church declines altogether to regard them as authoritative or to use them, as she uses the other books of the Old and New Testament, as a standard of her doctrine. Here, then, is an important difference between the two branches of the Church. Its origin lies far back,\* and must be sought in the Greek translation of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, to which (probably for the sake of completeness) were appended various books (some translations of Hebrew, others written originally in Greek), which were certainly not regarded as sacred by the Jews. There is abundant evidence to prove that the Jewish Church never admitted into her Canon of Scripture those books to which we refuse a place in ours; and, what is surely decisive for us, it is only to the books of the Hebrew

\* Reference may perhaps be permitted to my volume on the 'Thirty-nine Articles.

Canon (excluding the Apocrypha) that our LORD and His Apostles make formal appeal, and it is these alone which they stamp with Divine authority. In the Christian Church our earliest witnesses all point to this collection, and to this alone, as formally and distinctly recognised. But, at the same time, it needs but little research to discover that quotations from the Apocrypha are abundant in the writings of the Christian Fathers from the earliest days. Nor is the fact hard to account for. The Fathers were, with scarcely an exception, ignorant of Hebrew, and dependent on a Greek translation for their knowledge of the Old Testament. In this translation the books of the Apocrypha had somehow become attached to the Canonical books, and hence it was only natural that the Fathers should fall into the habit of employing and quoting all the books in the collection with which they were familiar, and should gradually lose their sense of the distinction between the books of the Hebrew Canon and the additions of the Greek, and should come to regard all alike as equally authoritative and equally inspired. Thus the confusion arose ; and although, in spite of popular opinion, a continuous succession of the more learned Fathers maintained the distinctive authority of the Hebrew Canon right up to the period of the Reformation, yet the Council of Trent, when called upon to consider the question, ignored altogether this weight of critical authority, and solemnly and formally placed the Apocrypha on a position of perfect equality with the Hebrew Canon, and by this decree the Roman



Catholic Church has ever since been bound. The Council, of course, claimed to be a general one, representing the whole Christian world, but, as a matter of fact, no part of the world was really represented except Italy. There were only fifty-three Bishops present when the decree was promulgated. The great bulk of them were Italian; of the rest, the majority were Spanish. There were a couple from France, none from Germany, Switzerland, or the Northern countries, and none, of course, from England. And it should be added that the poorest account has to be given of the scholarship and learning of those who were present. None knew Hebrew, only a few Greek. There were even some whose knowledge of Latin was held in but low repute; and among them all there was not one scholar distinguished by historical learning, not one who was fitted by special study for the examination of a subject in which the truth could only be determined by the voice of antiquity.\* Well may the decision be termed by one of our greatest divines† a ‘fatal decree,’ and well may we be thankful that the Church of England has been preserved from an error so damaging to the cause of truth. On the other hand, it is, I think, a matter for real thankfulness that, unlike most of the Protestant bodies in this country as well as on the Continent, the Anglican Church has declined altogether to break away from the practice of the Early Church,

\* See the *Speaker's Commentary*, ‘The Apocrypha,’ vol. i., p. xxxiii.

† Bishop Westcott, *The Bible in the Church*, p. 257.

or to discard these books altogether. She appeals here, as always, to the primitive Church, and finding that in early days these books were regarded as fit for ecclesiastical reading in public worship and for devout study in private, though not employed as authoritative standards in establishing doctrine nor regarded as Canonical, she has retained their use; and in order to make quite clear the exact position to be given them, has made her own some words of the most learned of the Latin Fathers, St. Jerome, which I have already quoted from the sixth Article. 'The other books (as Hierome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners, yet doth not apply them to establish any doctrine.' She thus guards against confusion and abuse on the one hand, and on the other places herself in accord with the practice of antiquity, and does justice to what Hooker calls 'the divine excellency of some things in all, and of all things in certain of those Apocrypha'; and if it be urged against her that in what she reads there happen to be some things that savour of error, she is content to reply in the words of the same great divine by asking the pertinent question whether the 'admixture of a little dross' should 'constrain the Church to deprive herself of so much gold rather than to learn how by judgment and art to make separation of the one from the other.'\*

That is the historical justification of the position given by the English Church to the Apocrypha, as distinguished both from the over-regard

\* See Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V., xx.

paid to it by Rome, and also from the neglect of it by Protestants. And now, lastly, let us ask in what the real value of these books consists, and what sort of profit we may expect to draw from them.

Well, to begin with, they fill up a gap in our knowledge, and supply what would otherwise be a blank page in the history of the Jews. The general course of Jewish history is tolerably familiar to most people from the record in the Old Testament, which brings the story down to the time of the return from the Babylonish Captivity and the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. But there the Canonical books leave us, and were it not for the Apocrypha we should be left with a blank of more than 400 years between this epoch and that morning when, in the days of Herod the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense, and there appeared to him an angel of the LORD, and announced the birth of a son who should go before the face of the LORD in the spirit and power of Elijah.\* What happened during that interval? How are we to account for the change, not only in the government and political and civil status of the Jews, which we discover from the New Testament has taken place, but also in the condition of Jewish thought, and feeling and belief? In the Old Testament the Jews are perpetually falling away into idolatry. In the New Testament we find no hankering after this, no desire for the worship of strange

\* Luke i. 5-17.

gods. Monotheism has become the passionate faith of the people. Their universal conviction is that there is one GOD, and there is none other but He. Again, we find that at the time of our LORD's appearing there was a universal belief in the advent of a Messiah, and a general persuasion that His coming was close at hand. The doctrine, also, not only of a future life, but of the resurrection of the body, had become the firm conviction of the most religious part of the nation. The whole atmosphere, so to speak, is different from what it was in the days of the Old Testament. And how comes this? What has brought it about? Apart from the Apocrypha, it would be inexplicable, and must remain an unsolved enigma. But the possession of these books enables us to trace out the external history of the Jews and to follow their fortunes in the interval, and also to discern the development of their religious faith, for they include the most authentic and valuable remains of Jewish literature belonging to the period between, say, the prophecies of Malachi and the birth of our LORD. We may well be thankful that from this period there have been preserved to us Jewish historical records so valuable as those contained in the two Books of the Maccabees, Jewish poetry so noble and sentiments so lofty as are contained in the Books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, and imaginative writing so natural and vivid as is found in the Books of Tobit and Judith.

And then, further, we should read these books, not only to fill up a gap in our knowledge of the

past, and to enable us to understand the New Testament better, but also (as our Article says) 'for example of life and instruction in manners.' In these matters there are real practical lessons to be learnt from them. We could ill afford to lose the ethical teaching of the Son of Sirach, or its grand teaching on the heavenly wisdom, nor could we spare such exquisite passages as those from the Book of Wisdom which are read as the first lessons on All Saints' Day, which cannot fail to touch and stir the hearts of all who hear them. Such passages are as music to the soul, and there are many other portions which are full of help as well. The Book of Tobit not only gives us clear teaching on such practical duties as prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, but it gives a real 'example of life' in its beautiful picture of family life, in which parents give counsel to their children, children love and obey their parents, and God's angel advises, guides, and heals those who maintain their faith and loyalty to Him even in times of personal poverty and national disaster, while (to mention only one other portion) the two Books of Maccabees, with their account of the heroic struggle of the Jews for national liberty and for the faith of their fathers, may well nerve us in any times of distress or anxiety to dare and suffer all things for His sake, secure—as these books show us that the Jewish heroes of old were secure—in the thought that impiety and blasphemy receive their punishment at God's hands, that prayer is heard, that God fights on the side of His saints and delivers them, and that if He suffer them to

be afflicted it is for the purpose of chastening and purifying them, and that, even if they are called upon to suffer the worst that can happen to man in this life, they can bear it with a good courage, because of the hope that they have in the LORD, and because, like the seven martyr sons of the Maccabean mother, they look for a better resurrection.

It is in ways like these that, in Bunyan's words, we may 'take comfort' of the Apocrypha and bless GOD for it ; and if only we study it, we shall find, as he did, that oftentimes it will 'shine before our face.'

## XXV

# The Book of Wisdom

JOB xxviii. 28 : 'The fear of the LORD, that is wisdom ; and to depart from evil is understanding.'\*

IT is a remarkable and significant fact that as a general rule in Holy Scripture the word 'wise' is applied only to those who are wise enough to serve GOD and to fear Him, while the term 'fools' is reserved for those who are so foolish as to neglect and ignore Him in their daily life. They are 'fools' who 'make a mock at sin.'† It is 'the fool' who 'saith in his heart, There is no GOD,'‡ and shapes his life accordingly, though all the while he may think himself supremely wise, and be endowed with a magnificent intellect. So, on the other hand, Daniel tells us that hereafter 'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.'§ Folly, then, in Scriptural phraseology, is wilful ignorance, sinfulness, and carelessness, every act

\* For much of the material of this sermon the writer is indebted to the Rev. W. J. Deane's *Commentary on the Book of Wisdom*, and to the *Speaker's Commentary* on 'The Apocrypha.'

† Prov. xiv. 9.

‡ Ps. xiv. 1.

§ Dan. xii. 3.



and habit opposed to the love of GOD and the practice of holiness ; while wisdom, which is an attribute of the Most High, when manifested among men, is that gift of GOD which enables men to seek Him as the end and object of their life, to give themselves up to His guiding hand, to know and do His will. 'The fear of the LORD, that is wisdom ; and to depart from evil is understanding.' The late Professor Huxley, in one of his essays, remarks that 'the only medicine for suffering, crime, and all the other woes of mankind is wisdom.' Huxley was more right than he knew. The advance of science, indeed, and the spread of accurate information will never cure all the ills that man is heir to. But wisdom is more than intellectual knowledge, and she can do it ; for she is 'the breath of the power of GOD, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty, therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of GOD, and the image of His goodness. And being but one, she can do all things ; and remaining in herself, she maketh all things new ; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of GOD and prophets. For GOD loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars. Being compared with the light, she is found before it. For after this cometh night, but vice shall not prevail against wisdom.'\*

\* Wisd. vii. 25-30.

This wonderful and strangely beautiful description of wisdom that I have just read to you will be familiar to some as occurring, not in any of the Canonical books of Holy Scripture, but in one of those works which 'the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners,'\* and nowhere in the Old Testament is the true position and power of wisdom more magnificently described than in it. We read the whole of this book—it is called the Book of Wisdom—in the course of the daily lessons, and on All Saints' Day the first lessons at Matins and Evensong are taken from it. But since it is never read in the course of the Sunday lessons, it is, unhappily, but little known to the majority of Church-people, many of whom have probably never read it through in the whole course of their lives, and have only very occasionally heard a chapter of it read in church, and perhaps wondered where it came from, and what it was all about. I have thought, therefore, that it might be well to bring the book as a whole before you and invite you to listen to a sermon upon it.

Who wrote the book is not known to us. The title which it bears in our English Bibles, the Wisdom of Solomon, has come down to us from antiquity, and, though the name of Solomon does not occur in it, it is clear from such a passage as this, which is found in chapter ix., that it is written in the character of Solomon: 'Thou hast chosen me to be a king of Thy people, and a judge of Thy sons and daughters. Thou hast

\* Article VI.

commanded me to build a temple upon Thy holy mount, and an altar in the city wherein Thou dwellest.'\* These words are sufficient to indicate that the writer personates Solomon, but it would be a mistake to conclude from them that the work must either be by Solomon himself or else a forgery. It is really only an example of literary personation which is common in the literature of all ages, and which our own poets have frequently indulged in. There can be no doubt that when the writer introduces Solomon himself speaking, it was not done with any intention of leading his readers to believe that the work was a genuine production of the son of David. The adoption of the name belongs only to the literary form, Solomon being the wise king of old in whose mouth the writer felt that he might most appropriately place the sentiments he desired to set before his contemporaries. All the evidence goes to prove that the work is a late one, written by some Alexandrian Jew, in Greek, not Hebrew, and after Greek influence had made itself felt among the Jews, but before the rise of Christianity. It must be placed before this, because there is a marked absence in it of any reference to distinctively Christian doctrine. Nowhere is there any allusion to the Incarnation or to the Atonement, or to the Resurrection—indeed, there is no trace at all of any knowledge of Christ, and therefore no Christian could have written it. Moreover, there are in some of St. Paul's epistles such striking coincidences of language with this book as to

\* Wisd. ix. 7, 8.

prove pretty convincingly that the great Apostle of the Gentiles must have been familiar with it, and borrowed thoughts and phrases (perhaps half unconsciously) from it,\* while the correspondence of ideas and diction that may be traced between it and the Epistle to the Hebrews is so close that an ingenious suggestion has been thrown out† that both treatises may be the work of the same writer—possibly Apollos, who was ‘an Alexandrian Jew, mighty in the Scriptures,’‡ the Book of Wisdom being written before, and the Epistle to the Hebrews after, his conversion to the Christian faith. This, however, is little more than a fanciful conjecture. The book as it has come down to us is really anonymous. The author has concealed his name. Like the writer of the *Imitatio Christi* of later date, he was one who desired to be unknown in this world. *Ama nesciri* might well have been his motto, and we must be content to have it so.

Where and why he wrote, and under what circumstances, we can, however, state with tolerable certainty. There are abundant indications in the book itself which show that it was written at a time of something very like a national apostasy. Old pious customs and beliefs had been abandoned, and the writer’s contemporaries were in danger of falling away into materialism, idolatry, and sensualism with open immorality.

\* See the *Expositor*, vol. iv. (2nd series), p. 209 *et seq.*

† By the late Dean Plumptre (after Noack); see the *Expositor*, vol. i. (1st series), p. 329 *et seq.*

‡ Acts xviii. 24

They were no longer secluded from contact with the heathen world, but were surrounded by Gentiles, who crossed their path in a thousand ways. Now, Alexandria was the place where, in the centuries immediately before Christ, the contact of Jew and Gentile was closest, and it was probably there that the author of this book lived and wrote. In the time of the Ptolemies Alexandria was filled with Jews. They numbered nearly one-third of the whole population, and, living in the very centre of heathen culture, they could not fail to be influenced by the spirit of the place. 'Here they saw that Epicurean indifference, that luxurious selfishness, that gross materialism, that virtual denial of Providence, which are so sternly and eloquently rebuked in the Book of Wisdom. Here they witnessed that bestial idolatry and that debased revolt against the pure worship of God which meet with such severe handling in this work. A man who had these things daily before his eyes, whose righteous soul was continually vexed with this opposition to all his cherished beliefs, would naturally thus deliver his testimony, and brand the surrounding heathenism with the fire of his words.'\* But it was evidently not the heathen only of whom he was thinking. There were sadly too many of his own countrymen who were being led astray, and were in danger of sinking to the level of their surroundings, and it is to them mainly that he addresses himself. To them he appeals by the lessons of their national history, and by the

\* Deane, *The Book of Wisdom*, p. 30.

memory of the noble conceptions of wisdom as framed in some of the books of their national literature. She is the preserver, the deliverer, the sole source of immortality, the unique bestower of every blessing. She gives joy and peace, and consolation in sorrow, and power, and fame, and honour, and immortal memory, and is better than all riches, and health, and beauty. He who possesses her needs nothing besides. He who is without her is on the path of destruction. Wisdom more than atones for every earthly calamity. Childlessness and a short life might be regarded as misfortunes, but when they befell the possessor of wisdom they were blessings far more consummate than the many children of long-lived sinners. The punishments of the heathen are long-continued, overwhelming, and retributive. Israel too might suffer, but his sufferings were only such as were due to mild and fatherly correction. The afflictions of the godly are compensated beyond the grave—righteousness is immortal. This is the basis of the writer's ethical system, and it has been well said that it conducts us to the very threshold of Christianity itself.\*

Wisdom, then, is the theme of the book—wisdom as the guide of men through all the temptations, perplexities, and tangles of this world, and wisdom as the light that can lead men on to a glorious immortality and a life after death. The book is divided into three well-

\* See the *Speaker's Commentary*, 'The Apocrypha,' vol. i., p. 418, from which the preceding paragraph is condensed.



defined sections, in each of which a different aspect of the subject is presented to us.

In the first section, which lasts from chapter i. to chapter v., the dominant thought is that wisdom is the guide to immortality. Here there stands out with far greater clearness than in any of the Canonical books of the Old Testament the thought of a future life. The attainment of wisdom, we are told, is only possible to those who live pure and moral lives. Wisdom is life and immortality, sin leads to punishment and death. With the sceptical despair, the sensual Epicureanism, and the malignant violence of the scorers are contrasted the hopes and blessings of the righteous, who, under the protecting care of God, attain a blessed immortality. It is in this section that there occur those two singularly beautiful passages, selected as the first lessons at Matins and Evensong on All Saints' Day, which have brought help and comfort to millions of bereaved souls, and have stirred up thousands to fresh struggles against sin and renewed efforts after holiness of life.

'The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction, but they are in peace. For, though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded, for God proved them, and found them worthy for Himself.'



That is one passage, and now listen to this other, which describes the judgment as a reversal of human opinion.

‘ Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for. And they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit shall say within themselves, This was he, whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints! Therefore have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness hath not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction : yea, we have gone through deserts where there lay no way ; but, as for the way of the LORD, we have not known it. What hath pride profited us? or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasted by ; and as a ship that passeth over the waves of the water, which when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found, neither the pathway of the keel in the waves ; or as when a bird hath flown through the air, there is no token of her way to be found, but the light air being beaten with the stroke of her wings, and parted

with the violent noise and motion of them, is passed through, and therein afterwards no sign where she went is to be found ; or like as when an arrow is shot at a mark, it parteth the air, which immediately cometh together again, so that a man cannot know where it went through : even so we in like manner, as soon as we were born, began to draw to our end, and had no sign of virtue to show, but were consumed in our own wickedness. For the hope of the ungodly is like dust that is blown away with the wind ; like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm ; like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day. But the righteous live for evermore ; their reward also is with the LORD, and the care of them is with the Most High. Therefore shall they receive a glorious kingdom, and a beautiful crown from the LORD's hand : for with His right hand shall He cover them, and with His arm shall He protect them.'

It would be hard to find nobler passages than these two, and if we had none beside them we might be thankful that this book had come down to us.

In the second part of the book (chapters vi.-ix.) wisdom is more fully described as the source of all moral as well as intellectual blessings. It is in this that we have that fine passage describing her as 'the breath of the power of God,' which I quoted at the outset. Earthly potentates are urged to remember their responsibilities, and to

seek and pray for wisdom. Wisdom is the true secret of power, the greatest of all earthly blessings, and the glorious source of all that is morally or intellectually to be desired. Without wisdom man is ignorant, feeble, sensuous, unspiritual ; he can be saved by wisdom alone. It is a point of wisdom to know whose gift she is ; and therefore men must pray unto the LORD and beseech Him with their whole heart that this blessed gift may be theirs. This leads to the sublime prayer for wisdom which is put into the mouth of Solomon in chapter ix., and then the third and remaining section of the book (chapters x.-xix.) is mainly taken up with historical illustrations intended to enforce the lessons of the previous chapters, and to show what a power wisdom has been in human history. The heroes of wisdom are the heroes of faith. Wisdom preserves the just and punishes the wicked. She preserved Adam, and punished Cain and his guilty race ; she preserved Abraham and Lot, but punished the people of Sodom ; she preserved Jacob and Joseph, and she delivered Israel by the instrumentality of Moses. This leads to an elaborate contrast which is drawn between the punishment of Egypt and the fatherly providence which protected Israel ; and the writer ends his task with a thankful recognition of God's love and mercy to His own people, whom He has never lightly regarded, but has assisted in every time and place.\*

\* See the *Speaker's Commentary*, 'The Apocrypha,' vol. i., p. 403.

Such is the Book of Wisdom, which, following the practice of antiquity, the Church of England commends to her children by requiring it to be read at the daily services of Matins and Evensong. It is said that the good old custom of reading a chapter of the Bible morning and evening in private has sadly died out of late. I know not how much truth there is in this, but I would venture to suggest that to read daily a chapter out of this most beautiful book would be a devotional exercise that would be profitable for all. It would give them a new and deeper sense of the great truth that 'God is love,' and would send them forth to their daily work with fresh courage, inspired (to use a phrase which we owe to its author) with a 'hope full of immortality.'

## XXVI

### The Position of the Church of England with Regard to the Criticism of the Old Testament\*

It is no exaggeration to say that fifty years ago the science of Biblical criticism was utterly unknown in England. At an earlier period this country had produced critics of whom any nation might be proud.† But among the prominent figures in the Church in 1846 there are very few who can claim any sort of distinction in this particular line. Of the leaders of the Tractarian Movement (with one exception) it cannot be said that they showed any special interest in the subject, or did anything to promote the critical study of Holy Scripture. The exception, of course, is the honoured name of Edward Bouverie Pusey. In the course of his controversy with Hugh James Rose on German theology, in 1825-1828, he had lamented a 'one sidedness' among English critics, and had noticed

\* Reprinted, by permission of the proprietors, from the *Guardian* of January 22, 1896.

† *E.g.*, Richard Bentley, 1662-1742, and Robert Lowth, 1710-1787.

'weak points' and a 'certain stiffness' among some who maintained what he believed to be the truth.\* And though in after-years he regretted the controversy, and somewhat withdrew from the position which he had taken up, yet his name stands out as that of the one man among the early Tractarians who realised the importance of fostering the intelligent study of Holy Scripture, and who did something to supply the want which he had felt twenty years before. In 1846 he was already projecting a commentary on the whole Bible, to be the work of various scholars,† a scheme which unfortunately fell to the ground, the only portion of the commentary that ever appeared being his own work on the minor prophets. The first instalment of this was published in 1860. But scarcely had it made its appearance when the 'results' of Biblical criticism were set before English Churchmen in a singularly ill-judged and unfortunate manner. It is hard to imagine anything more mischievous to the truest interests of the Church than the controversies raised by the publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860) and Colenso's work on the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua (Part I., 1862; Part II., 1863).

It was in these works that 'the Higher Criticism' was first introduced to the great body of English Churchmen; they were flung down before a public utterly unprepared for them. To most Churchmen the subject was entirely novel, and the manner in

\* *Life*, by H. P. Liddon, vol. i., p. 174.

† *Ibid.*, vol. iii., p. 149 *et seq.*

which the writers who came forward to instruct them set about their task was not calculated to recommend their cause. They appeared to delight in startling people and in upsetting generally - received views. They committed themselves to various rash and ill-considered statements.

Their work was purely negative and destructive,\* and marked by a flippant and contemptuous tone which could not but be extremely painful to reverent minds. Dean Church spoke of *Essays and Reviews* at the time as a 'reckless book,'† and a fresh perusal of the essays bearing upon the Old Testament at the present day, when the views propounded are no longer novelties, makes us feel that his verdict was absolutely correct. It is no wonder that people were frightened and lost their heads, and that the outcry was loud and almost universal. Here and there grave voices of men who knew the real difficulties of the case pleaded for patient consideration of the questions raised ; but they passed unheeded in the din of the conflict. It is, however, instructive to see how the matter was regarded at the time by the few thoughtful men who were strong enough to keep their heads in the midst of the excitement, and subsequent events have shown how accurately they gauged the situation.

Thus R. W. Church, in the same letter which

\* Thus Dean Stanley, in speaking of *Essays and Reviews*, said : ' No book which treats of religious questions can hope to make its way to the heart of the English nation unless it gives at the same time that it takes away ' (*Life*, vol. ii., p. 33).

† *Life and Letters*, p. 157.



contained the phrase quoted above, says: 'Several of the writers have not got their thoughts and theories into such order and consistency as to warrant their coming before the world with such revolutionary views. But there has been a great deal of unwise panic and unjust and hasty abuse, and people who have not an inkling of the difficulties which beset the questions are for settling them in a summary way, which is perilous for everybody.'\* So J. B. Lightfoot said that Colenso's book, 'Poor as it is, will do a vast deal of harm among unthinking, well-intentioned people. The result, I am afraid, must be to discredit reasonable inquiry with reverent spirits, and to divide men into two extreme parties, who will wage fierce war against each other, and trample the truth under foot between them.' He adds: 'I have tried in vain to extract a grain of comfort from the publication of the book. I feel very strongly, however, that it is a warning against over much caution in handling such subjects, for a frank and liberal treatment of the difficulties of the Old Testament, if it had been general, would have drawn the sting of Bishop Colenso's criticism, even if it had not rendered the publication altogether impossible.'†

The whole matter could not be better summed up than it was by Archbishop Tait, then Bishop of London, in a private memorandum drawn up

\* *Life and Letters*, p. 157.

† *Life of Archbishop Tait*, vol. i., p. 338. Cf. *Life and Correspondence of A. P. Stanley*, vol. ii., p. 39, where similar language is quoted.

at the time : ' The Liberals are deficient in religion, and the religious are deficient in liberality.'\* The results upon the Church at large were simply deplorable. Men were forced into one or other of the opposing camps. ' Concessions ' were regarded as a sign of weakness. There seemed to be no room for a middle party. The hue and cry was so great that men were frightened off the ground altogether, and shut their eyes to the real difficulties to which the writers had called attention. So in 1869 Dean Church speaks of the outcry against Dr. Temple's appointment to the See of Exeter as ' the direct result of the extravagant measures which were taken years ago against the *Essays and Reviews*. People then got committed, in Convocation and elsewhere, to a false position against it; they are obliged in consistency to shriek at the very name of it.'†

And a still more striking passage may be quoted from a letter of the same writer to Dr. Liddon on the subject of Biblical criticism, written exactly twenty years later :

' Ever since I could think at all I have felt that these anxious and disturbing questions would one day or other be put to us, and that we were not quite prepared or preparing to meet them effectively. To us Church-people the general answer was so clear that it made us think that they wanted no further trouble, and they have been left outside our sphere of interest, to be dealt with by a cruel and insolent curiosity, utterly reckless of results, and even enjoying the pleasure

\* *Life*, vol. i., p. 325.

† *Life and Letters*, p. 182.

of affronting religion and religious faith. This was sure to be, from the intellectual and moral conditions of our time; but it seems to me that our apologetic and counter criticism has let itself be too much governed by the lines of the attack, and that we have not adequately attempted to face things for ourselves, and in our own way, in order not merely to refute, but to construct something positive on our own side. That, it seems to me, is the great triumph of Bull's *Defensio* and of your Bampton, and we want something of the same kind, which has not yet been done, for the Bible—what it really is, how it came to be, who gave it us. That the difficulties about it have been forced, not on arrogant and conceited 'experts,' claiming monopoly of all criticism, but on deep-thinking and devout Catholic believers like —, and have given him trouble, seems to me to show that there is something unsatisfactory in the present condition of things.\*

Nothing could better express the true state of the case, and the position taken up by the Church of England for nearly thirty years. Answers to *Essays and Reviews* and to Colenso's works were published by the score; but it must be admitted that for the most part they are as one-sided as the books which they condemn, and fail to deal adequately with the real difficulties, which thoughtful students could not wholly ignore. One outcome of the controversy, however, deserves to be separately mentioned. There was a widespread feeling that the average layman was placed

\* *Life and Letters*, p. 341.

in a disadvantageous position, and had no opportunity of knowing what was said, or of meeting the difficulties that might be raised in connection with criticism. Accordingly, in 1864, the Archbishop of York was consulted by the Speaker of the House of Commons (the Right Hon. J. Evelyn Denison) on the subject, and the result was the publication of what is commonly known as *The Speaker's Commentary*. As a whole, it can hardly be called a success. The writers of the volumes on the books of the Old Testament were still under the influence of the panic created by the events mentioned above, and too often betray an inadequate conception of the problems which the student of the Old Testament is called upon to solve. Still, it was an honest, if not wholly satisfactory, attempt to supply an admitted want. As such, it stands almost alone. The first volume was published in 1870; the last (on the Old Testament) in 1876. Still earlier, Bishop Perowne's scholarly work on the Psalms had made its appearance (1864-1868). But with these exceptions, there were very few critical works on the Old Testament of any real value published by any English Churchman for twenty years or more from the date of the unfortunate controversies.\* No general interest was manifested in the subject, and though Messrs. T. and T. Clark's Foreign

\* Mention should perhaps be made of the publication of Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* (1863), and of Stanley's *Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church* (vol. i., 1862; vol. ii., 1864).

Theological Library supplied a want and found a ready sale, yet, as the works on the Old Testament selected for translation were mainly on conservative lines,\* they did not materially contribute to any advance being made.

Meanwhile, a new generation was growing up, and there were already competent scholars in England, who, while following with keen interest the course of Old Testament criticism abroad, were working away independently, patiently grappling with the problems, and slowly maturing their own views. But the great body of intelligent and thoughtful Churchmen still stood aloof, and probably knew very little of what was being said and thought by the leaders of criticism on the Continent, and of the wide acceptance of the Grafian hypothesis of the relation of Deuteronomy to the priestly laws, and the post-exilic date of the 'Grundschrift.' Stanley had familiarised English readers with Ewald. W. R. Smith's works ought to have familiarised them with Wellhausen. But the controversy with which the name of the Scotch professor is connected did not stir any feeling in this country, and his books,† though eagerly read by scholars, somehow failed to attract popular attention. Even the publication of the Revised Version of the Old Testament in 1885 awoke but a languid interest compared with that which had been aroused by the appearance of the

\* The commentaries of Keil and the earlier editions of Delitzsch's works.

† *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (1881); *The Prophets of Israel* (1882).

Revised New Testament four years earlier. The committee appointed to revise the Old Testament had proceeded on far more conservative lines than their colleagues at work on the New Testament had done. The changes of rendering introduced by them were less conspicuous and comparatively few in number, nor were any exciting questions of textual criticism raised by their work, since they 'thought it most prudent to adopt the Massoretic text as the basis of their work, and to depart from it, as the authorised translators had done, only in exceptional cases.' Not until the year 1889 did Churchmen generally awake to the fact that a change had come over the spirit of the criticism of the Old Testament, and that some who were devout and loyal Churchmen, as well as reverent-minded scholars, not only felt the difficulties keenly, but were prepared to face the fact that 'criticism' could not be silenced by the appeal to authority, and that the Church was bound to find a place for its assured results. The publication of Mr. Gore's essay in *Lux Mundi* marks an epoch in the history of thought upon this subject. Mr. Gore wrote, not as a specialist in the Higher Criticism, but rather as a Churchman who felt the weight of the main arguments urged by the higher critics in support of many of their conclusions, and who was prepared to admit these conclusions as such that might be legitimately held in the English Church, and as perfectly compatible with a full belief in the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Naturally, a considerable number of Churchmen were startled and perplexed, and



felt themselves quite unable to accept the position set before them ; but, at the same time, there can be no doubt that Mr. Gore gave voice to thoughts that were rising in the minds of many, and that to younger men in particular his utterances brought a sense of relief. Since then we have all become familiar with the Higher Criticism. The essay aroused attention and stimulated inquiry. The way was thus prepared for other works dealing more fully with the questions to which he had briefly alluded ; and the rapid and surprising success of Dr. Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*\* is the best evidence of the general interest now at last excited on the subject. It cannot be said that even yet Churchmen are all of one mind. Some may even assert that the day is far distant when they will be. And it is probable that they are right in this, for much remains to be done before we are in possession of all the facts, and till then our conclusions can only be provisional. For instance, the whole study of textual criticism of the Old Testament needs to be put on a much surer basis before a final decision can be arrived at on some of the problems raised by the Higher Criticism. The Massoretic text is no longer regarded with the reverence accorded to it fifty years ago, but we are still in the stage of conjectural emendations of it, and the emendations suggested certainly sometimes appear to be due to the preconceived ideas of the critic, with which the text must be

\* Published in 1891. Fifth edition, with an appendix, in 1894.



made to fit. The real value of the versions is only beginning to be understood, and before they can be properly used and appealed to their text must first be settled. Happily, in undertaking this most necessary work, our Universities are leading the way. The Clarendon Press some years ago gave us Mr. Field's magnificent edition of Origen's *Hexapla* (1875), and is now following it up by the publication of the invaluable *Concordance to the Septuagint*, begun by the late Mr. Hatch, and now safe in the hands of Mr. Redpath; while last year (1895) saw the completion of Professor Swete's manual edition of the *Septuagint* issued by the Pitt Press, and we are promised at some future date a larger edition — 'With the variations of all the Greek uncial MSS., of select cursive MSS., of the more important versions, and of the quotations made by Philo and the earlier and more important ecclesiastical writers.'

Till this most necessary work on the text and the versions is complete, it is obvious that there must remain a considerable element of uncertainty in some of the conclusions of the Higher Criticism.

Moreover, our knowledge of Hebrew grammar and of the meaning of many Hebrew words is steadily increasing. No one can study the grammars which have appeared during the last few years without feeling what an advance has been made of late, and the new Hebrew Lexicon, edited by Professors Driver, Brown, and Briggs (for which, again, we have to thank the Clarendon Press), is a vast improvement on any that had

previously been published. But even here we have not reached finality; and as our knowledge of Assyrian becomes more thorough, it is probable that a good deal of fresh light will be thrown upon the meaning and relation of many Hebrew words, and the next fifty years may witness still greater advances than those which have been already made. Nor can the discoveries of archæologists be neglected. Here, again, there is no reason for thinking that we have come to a standstill. Fresh discoveries may any day be made which will upset the dominant theory, and so long as the spade of the explorer is at work and new facts come to light, the conclusions of the critics must be subject to revision. It is admitted that the student of the Old Testament has more material at his command than he ever had before, and that he is far better equipped for his task to-day than he was even ten years ago. But ten years hence he will probably be better equipped still. Meanwhile, two happy results of the opening up of the subject of the criticism of the Old Testament may be noticed, for each of which we have good cause to be thankful. First, as was said by a thoughtful speaker at the Rhyl Church Congress, we have 'gained the critics.' Those who cannot without intellectual dishonesty withhold their assent to the arguments for the newer views are no longer compelled to feel that, if true to the leading of their reason and loyal to their intellectual convictions, they must seek a home elsewhere than in the Church of England. They find that there is still a place for

them in her communion, and that they can fully and frankly accept those results of criticism, which appear to them to be established almost to demonstration, without surrendering their faith in the inspiration of Holy Scripture, or losing their hold upon a single article of their creed. Secondly, upon Churchmen generally the lesson of earlier controversies has not been thrown away. That which Archbishop Tait noted as the great evil in 1860 is not true in 1896. Whatever may be said of some others elsewhere, it is certainly not the case here in the Church of England, that as a body 'the liberals' in the matter of criticism 'are deficient in religion,' nor should their opponen be charged with being 'deficient' in liberality. In 'conservative' quarters it is generally confessed now that the questions raised are such as legitimately fall within the providence of criticism; and there is far less tendency than there formerly was to denounce the newer views, and to attempt to silence the critics by the appeal to authority. On either side the appeal is to criticism itself, and the arguments of both parties are, or at least are intended to be, purely critical. In this way the experience of the last fifty years has taught us much. The two camps, the 'analytical' and the 'traditional' (to adopt Bishop Ellicott's phraseology), still exist, and are still opposed to each other. But the asperities of the conflict are greatly softened. Grave questions are still keenly debated, and, as has been already indicated, on many matters suspense of judgment is the only attitude which those who are not specialists can

reasonably take up ; but we may fairly hope that when all the facts are before us and experts have said the last word, wherever the truth may ultimately be found to lie in regard to such questions as are now raised with regard to the composition, authorship, and character of the books of the Old Testament, the great body of English Churchmen will candidly and cheerfully accept it, and find that it has not in any degree shaken their faith or diminished their reverence for Holy Scripture.

## XXVII

### Criticisms of Holy Scripture and the Church's Gains thereby\*

THE subject specially allotted to me is the gain to the Church resulting from juster statements of Truth, as the outcome of recent criticism of Holy Scripture. Taking a broad view of the course of criticism on the Old Testament in late years, it seems to me that while there is much in it which appears to be arbitrary and unsatisfactory, two things at least are forced upon us: (1) The conviction that the position of Israel can no longer be *isolated* as it was formerly; and (2) The fact that *the principle of development* must be recognised as revolutionising many of our old conceptions.

1. The position of Israel is no longer so *isolated* as formerly; you see this in regard to its literature, and also its institutions.

(a) The spade of the explorer has been at work. It has unearthed a literature which furnishes remarkable parallels to the early traditions of Israel. It has revealed documents which are surprisingly similar to those which lie at the basis of the

\* This paper was read at the Rhyl Church Congress, October, 1891.

Book of Genesis. We point, and rightly point, to the no less surprising differences between the two, and the transformation which the records have undergone before they find a place in the Bible is hailed, and rightly hailed, as evidence that at least the inspiration of selection has been at work. But still, the fact that such parallels as those contained in the *Chaldean Genesis* and other books can be produced is most significant, and must be taken into account in any theory of the origin of the early books of the Old Testament. Again, the *methods* of literary composition in vogue among the ancients are called in to explain and illustrate the books of the Bible. We have learnt to allow for the 'Oriental' breadth of style and conception leading to statements which, if found in a Western writer accustomed to precision and mathematical exactness, could only be termed the grossest exaggerations. Apologue and dramatic personification are everywhere else recognised as allowable in literature, and therefore we are called upon now to recognise and allow for them in the literature of the Hebrews. So, as we go on, we find the writers of the Old Testament acting like early writers in other nations, combining, selecting, arranging, harmonising, and adapting their material; and thus, by means of the comparative method, aided by the fresh light contributed by the monuments of Egypt, Palestine, Assyria, and Babylonia, our conception of the character and meaning of much of the Old Testament has been silently but surely revolutionised.

(b) As with the literature, so with the institutions of Israel. In his masterly work on *The Religion of the Semites*, Dr. W. Robertson Smith has recently shown us how much the Mosaic law or the system of religion which prevailed in Israel had in common with that of the nations nearest of kin to it. The Hebrew race was but one branch of a great family, with rites and religious ideas to which striking parallels may be found in the rites and religious ideas of the Arabians and other Semitic peoples. 'The common element,' we are told, 'included not only such things as ritual and temple furniture, or the details of priestly organisation, but even the titles and many of the attributes of GOD, and especially the forms of the covenant in which He drew near to men.'

2. Again, the criticism of the last few years has taught us that the principle of development holds good in religion as well as nature. The literary analysis of the Pentateuch has been greatly aided by the application of the law that the simpler precedes the more complex. This is very clearly seen in the 'layers' of laws of varying age, which we are now told by sober critics, such as Delitzsch, can be recognised in the Pentateuch. We are now able to trace, as in former days was impossible, the origin, development, and growth of religious ideas, hopes, and aspirations among the Jews. The old order, 'The Law and the Prophets,' is to a great extent reversed, and we are bidden to accustom ourselves to speak of 'The Prophets and the Law.'

3. The facts thus hastily indicated are well



known and acknowledged by thoughtful students of different schools of criticism; but I doubt whether we have all sufficiently recognised how they must affect our whole conception of the history of Israel and its position in the world. It appears now as one among the nations, with institutions and laws which can be compared with the institutions and laws of those nations nearest of kin to it; with a literature which bears striking affinities in many parts to that of Babylon and Assyria, and which, in the view of many, is indebted to the literature of those nations, and even, it is now said, to that of Persia, for much that was formerly considered unique and special. Thus the fence that marked off Israel from the rest of the world seems to be broken down. It stands before us with a history alike in its broad features and main outlines to that of the nations around it, for one result of this complete revolution in our conception of Israel's position as regards other nations is this: it has now become possible, as it never was possible before, for a hostile critic to write a plausible history of Israel from a purely naturalistic standpoint, explaining and accounting for the whole course of events, without having recourse to the Divine interposition. The early narratives are brought into line with the early traditions and myths of other nations. Allowance is made for Eastern modes of thought and figures of speech, and for tendencies which are recognised as at work outside the Bible. Thus hostile critics can without difficulty explain as perfectly 'natural' much that was formerly considered to be

'miraculous,' or due to a special intervention of God on behalf of His chosen people. Take, for instance, the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity. What a different complexion it can be made to wear now from any which it could wear formerly! The startling character of the coincidence of the event with prophecy disappears when Isa. xl.-lxvi. is no longer the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem, but of an unknown prophet, living on the very verge of the restoration, when the victorious career of Cyrus was already beginning; and its special and providential character may easily be got rid of when we discover from the cylinder inscription of Cyrus himself that the blessing was not peculiar to the chosen people, but was shared by them in common with other nationalities, for Cyrus 'deliberately reversed the old policy of the Assyrian and Babylonian kings, which consisted in transporting the larger portion of a conquered population to another country, and sought instead to win their gratitude and affection by allowing them to return to their native land.'

4. This danger of eliminating God and His providence from the history is one which has to be met and fairly faced. But even at the cost of some risk I venture to think that it is an immense blessing to have gained the *greater sense of reality* which the study of the Old Testament in the light of modern criticism brings with it. There was something unreal and artificial in a good many of the explanations and reconciliations of the older commentaries; and there was a very real

danger lest the characters of the Old Testament should appear as puppets pulled by strings instead of real living men and women. All this is changed now. One result of the way in which the history of Israel is brought into line with that of other nations is that the incidents gain immensely in reality, and the history touches us far more closely than it ever did before. No one can read such a book as Mr. G. A. Smith's 'Isaiah' in the *Expositor's Bible* without feeling that Isaiah *lives* for him as he probably never did before. The gain in *reality and human interest* is immense.

5. This, however, is by no means the only or the greatest gain. Of far greater importance is it to have brought home to us a deeper sense of the ultimate unity of all things in GOD, and of the 'one increasing purpose' which runs through the ages, as GOD gradually reveals Himself to man. The time is coming—if, indeed, it has not already come—for a new 'Analogy of Religion to the constitution and course of Nature' to be written. Development has revolutionised our conception of the method of GOD's working in nature. Is it too much to say that it has revolutionised our conception of the method of His working in religion as well? Under the old view there was great danger, not only of reading back the whole of the New Testament revelation into the Old, thereby losing our sense of the gradual and progressive character of revelation, but also of coming to think that there was only one nation which GOD cared about, one sphere in which He was working, and one only, as if all the rest of the

world was left to itself; and practically only too many seemed to imagine that, although formerly GOD had manifested Himself in the world and done great wonders for His people, yet since the Ascension He had left the world to get on as best it could by itself. Such a notion has now become an impossibility for anyone who reflects at all. We still say that there was one sphere in which GOD was manifesting Himself and making Himself known in a special manner; but we dare not confine His working to that nation, and we are forced to admit that externally that nation bore a striking resemblance to those around it, and that things may have happened formerly very much as they happen to-day. Well, what follows from this? Two courses are open to you. You may either (1) deny GOD's interposition *throughout*—banish Him from the Old Testament as from the history of to-day, as the rationalist does; or (2) you may accept the view of history, which the Hebrew prophets were always struggling to set before their people. You may see in all things, *now as then*, the Hand of Him without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground. You may consider Him, not as an absentee GOD, or sitting apart in a remote position of general superintendence, but as present with all that is, and holding Sovereign sway over all things now as in the days when psalmist and prophet wrote. Let us learn to see GOD everywhere, in history as well as in nature, to-day, and trace even the commonest and most ordinary events to His providence and governance, as Israel did, and then I do not think

that the new reading of Israel's history will disturb us much ; and surely to those who believe in the promise, ' Lo, I am with you always,' it ought not to be difficult to do this. The Jew, outwardly so much like those around him, with the same sort of things happening to him as to them, with so much that was common in his institutions and ideas, yet *knew* that he possessed a key to the meaning of things which was not granted to others. He could see the hand of God everywhere, could believe that there was the Personal Will behind all phenomena, shaping, controlling, and directing ; could recognise this in whatever happened, and could claim to be the chosen race through whom God would specially reveal and work out His purposes to the world at large. Only let the Christian Church—the inheritor of promises—learn boldly to take up the very same position *to-day*, and the result will be a gain that will far more than counterbalance any loss that has come to us ; for it will *bring back God into the world*, and bring Him closer than ever into our daily lives.

‘ Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God ;  
But only he who *sees* takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.’

Let us read the Old Testament with this thought in our mind, and we shall find that its lessons are fresher and more fruitful than ever. We shall learn that GOD is working and acting and manifesting Himself to those who have eyes to see as truly to-day as He ever was in Israel of

old ; and the result of this will be that, although in the minds of some who have written on the history and brought forward illustrations and parallels from neighbouring nations there may have lurked the hope that GOD would be banished from the world, the weapons will be wrested from their hands, and, to borrow a striking phrase which I have somewhere read, 'the battle-guns which have been pointed against the Church in one generation shall be melted down into church bells for the next.' Yes, 'into church bells,' for the criticism which in the hands of some has seemed to be destructive of all that we hold most dear shall end in the hands of others by summoning back to the Church our children and our children's children in the generations that are yet to come.

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